M105 cc.6

AN INQUIRY INTO THE POWERS OF ECCLESIASTICS,

ON THE PRINCIPLES OF

SCRIPTURE AND REASON.

BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS WHICH COME TO YOU IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING; BUT INWARDLY THEY ARE RAVENING WOLVES.

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MDCCLXXVI.

BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE

PATRONS

OF

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY;

THE GENUINE FRIENDS OF CHRISTIANITY,

THE GUARDIANS OF THE MOST IMPORTANT

RIGHTS OF MANKIND,

AND THE SUREST BULWARK OF OUR

CIVIL CONSTITUTION;

THE FOLLOWING TREATISE

IS

WITH ALL POSSIBLE DEFERENCE

AND RESPECT,

INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

OF all the cauſes that have combined to injure the cauſe of Chriſtianity, and to prevent its ſucceſs; the author of the following ſheets hath been long of opinion, that the pride and arrogant claims of Eccleſiaſtics, and the miſrepreſentation of certain parts of ſcripture to ſupport theſe claims, have been none of the leaſt conſiderable.

As the moſt effectual ſervice, therefore, he was capable of doing to the intereſts of religion and ſociety, — this little work is intended to explain, and vindicate the common rights of chriſtianity; — to expoſe the falſe pretenſions of *prieſts* of every denomination, and to eſtabliſh the real value and importance of the miniſterial character.

AT the ſame time, he is not without ſome apprehenſions, notwithſtanding the integrity of his views, and his favourable intentions to the cauſe which he profeſſes to eſpouſe; and, even amidſt all that freedom of inquiry, enlargement of mind, and liberality of ſentiment, by which the preſent age is diſtinguiſhed; that ſo much of the *old leaven* may ſtill remain, as to embitter the ſpirits of ſome againſt him as a miſtaken friend, perhaps an inſidious foe to it. Regardleſs, however, of every cenſure of this kind, he is not afraid to make his appeal to the judicious and candid chriſtian. But, ſhould he flatter his readers with the hopes of finding here any thing original, he is afraid he ſhould only deceive himſelf. He aſſumes not the honour of being ranked among the learned or ingenious ſons of ſcience. He is a PLAIN MAN. He hath read his Bible, and thinks he hath entered into the ſpirit, and underſtands the leading deſign of it; and he is well pleaſed that by *that* ſpirit, and *this* deſign, his performance, ſuch as it is, ſhould be examined. Nor will he decline to be tried on the principles of reaſon, nor to be judged at the bar of common ſenſe.

BUT,

BUT, though he can promiſe nothing original — attached to no religious party, warped by prejudices to no eſtabliſhed creed, and under the influence of no authority, but the authority of the ſcriptures — he hath, at leaſt, the merit of treading in a track wholly his own. He hath borrowed from no one. The materials are wholly drawn from his own ideas, and the beſt judgement he could form from the divine record, and the malignant tendency of thoſe tenets he hath attempted to overturn; and will therefore, in all probability, exhibit ſome features ſufficient to mark a difference, in the manner and execution, from any other who may have written on the ſame ſubject. And it is not impoſſible, that what made ſome impreſſion upon his own mind, if he hath been happy enough to expreſs himſelf with perſpicuity, may have a ſimilar effect upon the minds of others.

THERE are two objections that may occur to the deſign and plan in general, which he begs leave to obviate. It may be ſaid that an attempt of this kind comes by far too late; that the author hath figured to himſelf pretenſions to which no order of eccleſiaſtics *now*

lay claim, and which no layman in his ſober ſenſes would liſten to with patience, much leſs deliberately adopt as a part of his creed. In anſwer to this he will only ſay, that, though his obſervation and experience have led him to very different ſentiments, he would feel a pleaſure in being ſatisfied of the juſtneſs of this objection, more than ſufficient to overbalance any little diſappointment in having employed his time and attention to no purpoſe. The *firſt* would be a matter of the laſt importance, in his judgment, to the happineſs of ſociety, and the intereſts of primitive chriſtianity; the *laſt* of no conſideration at all.

It may, perhaps, appear to ſome as another objection, that the ſeveral parts of this inquiry are too detached, and ſeem to have too little dependence upon one another. He can offer nothing in excuſe for this. A writer of more diſcernment and acuteneſs might have been able to have converted ſeparate chapters, and to have formed the ſeveral parts, into a train of arguments iſſuing in one general concluſion: but he could not, without weakening, in his apprehenſion, the evidence upon the whole. And, perhaps, the manner of treating

ing the ſubject he hath purſued, may have a better effect upon the generality, little accuſtomed to connect diſtant arguments, and to eſtimate their combined force. He will only add, he hath done his beſt. If his performance hath any merit, it will be read; the publick are candid. If it hath none, let it be treated with the contempt it deſerves.

AN

INQUIRY

INTO THE

POWERS OF ECCLESIASTICS.

CHAP. I.

OF PRIESTS.

SECT. I.

OF THE STATE OF THE QUESTION.

AS the Miniſters of the Chriſtian Religion have been conſidered under the general denomination of *Prieſts*; as, for many centuries, they ſeem with one voice to have aſſumed, and, it muſt be acknowledged, not a few ſtill do aſſume powers peculiar to that office — powers which, in the judgment of the author, never did, nor ever can, in the ordinary diſpenſations of Providence, belong to any mortal: to prevent miſtakes, and obviate reflections that might be injurious to his real ſentiments concerning the miniſterial function, he begs leave to begin with explaining ſhortly what preciſe idea he affixes to this extraordinary character.

A PRIEST-

A PRIESTHOOD may be defined, in a few words, to be — an order of men appropriated by divine inſtitution for performing certain offices in religion, which offices cannot be performed by one not thus authoriſed, without loſing their efficacy, or that bleſſing with which they are ſuppoſed to be attended. Or ſtill more explicitly — A *prieſthood* is an order of men governed by certain laws, and poſſeſſed of certain privileges, independent of ſociety, and ſuperior to the civil, moral, or common religious rights of mankind; whoſe office is ſacred, not from what they do, but in conſequence of certain powers with which they are veſted, either mediately in a fixed eſtabliſhed order and ſucceſſion, or immediately by God himſelf. This he apprehends is the proper idea of a *prieſthood:* and ſuch a prieſthood, it is affirmed, never did exiſt in any age, or among any people, ſo far as ſatisfying evidence can be offered, but under the Jewiſh theocracy alone. He therefore who pretends that the miniſterial acts which he performs, whatever their nature may be, or by whatever ſacred name he may be pleaſed to call them — whether accounted more ordinary, or more ſolemn — derive their value, not from particular qualifications natural or acquired, not from decency or order, not from the ſtation of preſident in a religious aſſembly, but from a certain myſterious connection, which is either primarily, or ultimately reſolvable into a peculiar divine conſtitution and energy, diſtinct from the laws by which ſociety is directed and governed: this man — whether he be a papiſt or a proteſtant, whether he be a miniſter of the church of Rome, of the church of England, or of the church of Scotland; or whether he be a profeſſed diſſenter from all eſtabliſhments — is a *deceiver*; and they

they who believe his pretenſions, and are under the ſpirit and influence of them, are, in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, the dupes of their own credulity and ſuperſtition. It may here not be improper, however, to advertiſe the reader that the word *prieſt* is commonly uſed, in the following ſheets, for every ſuch claimant, or pretender to ſuch extraordinary powers.

THIS is the arrogant and aſſuming character, equally injurious to the moral and civil rights of ſociety, which the author hath attempted to expoſe; without one inſinuation, 'tis hoped, unfriendly to the genuine miniſters of religion: he can ſay further, that he is well diſpoſed to make every conceſſion that the duties of publick and ſocial worſhip can poſſibly demand, and to acknowledge every degree of authority and reſpect, that publick teachers can in juſtice derive from thence. In order to inveſtigate this ſubject as far back as poſſible, we ſhall inquire, in the firſt place, what light revelation, from its earlieſt period, gives in this queſtion.

SECT. II.

OF THE LIGHT WHICH THE OLD TESTAMENT FURNISHES IN THIS QUESTION.

FROM the creation to the eſtabliſhment of the Jewiſh commonwealth, the ſacred record will afford us but little information with regard to the origin or nature of this inſtitution: it being confined almoſt entirely to a few general hints concerning the Antediluvian world, the deluge, Noah and his family, Abraham, and

and what ſpecially relates to his family: ſo that all we know of the patriarchal ſtate, may be ſummed up in a few words — That in proceſs of time it came to paſs that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord; and Abel brought alſo of the firſtlings of his flock; that afterwards Noah, then Abraham, and laſtly Jacob offered ſacrifices unto the Lord — That ignorance overſpread the face of the earth; the original impreſſions of the Deity being almoſt extinguiſhed, and every corner filled with violence; ſo that all fleſh had corrupted their ways — That to puniſh a world thus ſunk in wickedneſs, an univerſal deluge was ſent, which ſwept away its inhabitants: Noah and his family being alone diſtinguiſhed amidſt the dreadful cataſtrophe — That the world again multiplied, and as it multiplied, that a ſenſe of religion again decayed — That to preſerve juſt notions of the true God, and prevent the world from reverting into a ſtate of total ignorance and degeneracy, Abraham was ſelected, a man eminent for his piety; and both he and his deſcendants marked as the diſtinguiſhed and peculiar favourites of Heaven. This is a general view of the hiſtory of the world for two thouſand years: during which period we have not one public inſtitute with regard to any external form of religion.

From what hath been taken notice of, indeed, we are led to conclude that ſacrifices and offerings made a part of the primitive religion; but in what manner, or by whom they were performed, we are left entirely in the dark. The examples before us were, certainly, perſonal acts of devotion. Religion wrought up into no artificial form would be very ſimple: and it ſeems probable

bable that till mankind had encreaſed, every individual would be left to officiate for himſelf. But as ſocial worſhip, which conſiſts in certain external acts which all cannot perform with propriety, neceſſarily ſuppoſes, when ſociety became more numerous, that *one* muſt have acted in a publick capacity as miniſter or preſident, it is reaſonable to think that the heads of the reſpective families would be honoured with this character, or conſider themſelves as naturally entitled to it, and continue to officiate as miniſters within the circle of their own immediate deſcendants; and that when more widely diffuſed and mixed, ſo that it became impoſſible to join in acts of worſhip under one common head, ſome idea ſimilar to this would direct different ſocieties in their choice: that is, there would appear ſome one who, by age, connections, ſuperior wiſdom or piety, claimed a preference. Miniſters of religion, therefore, we are naturally led to ſuppoſe, muſt have been coeval with the firſt publick forms of devotion. But the divine record affords nothing, from the creation to the Abrahamic period, that can convey the moſt diſtant idea of a *prieſt*.

LET us now inquire whether the ſucceeding period, from Abraham to the commencement of the Jewiſh commonwealth, furniſhes any new diſcovery. And here we find two ſhort anecdotes concerning this office. "And Melchiſedec king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was a *prieſt* of the moſt high God; and he bleſſed him, and ſaid, bleſſed be Abraham of the moſt high God, poſſeſſor of heaven and earth." The hiſtory of Joſeph, who ſeems to have been a moſt political prime miniſter, preſents us with the other. Concerning

cerning whom we are informed, that " when he bought the lands of Egypt for his maſter, only the lands of the *prieſts* bought he not, for the *prieſts* had a portion aſſigned them by Pharaoh, and did eat of the portion which Pharaoh gave them; wherefore they ſold not their lands." This is all the light that can be derived from the ſacred hiſtory, and which can avail nothing by way of precedent. For with regard to Melchiſedec, as the ſhort hint given by the hiſtorian can lead us to nothing certain concerning the nature of his office, or the extent of his prieſtly powers; from the further accounts given of him (which is all we know of the matter) by the penman of the hundred and tenth pſalm, and the author of the epiſtle to the Hebrews, it evidently appears that he was a prieſt of ſo extraordinary a nature, that we cannot ſo much as form any idea of it; except in general, that he is exhibited as a ſtriking type of the great high prieſt over the houſe of God, and therefore can bear no ſimilitude to any ſettled order of prieſthood. And with regard to the Egyptian *prieſts*, it is ſufficient to obſerve, that they were the miniſters of the groſſeſt ſuperſtition and idolatry, of whoſe powers or ſucceſſion we know nothing.

ONE thing, however, we may learn from this ſtory, that an order of men thus diſtinguiſhed, and who had acquired ſuch credit with the ſtate, as to have lands aſſigned to them, and beſides a daily portion of meat from Pharaoh, had not attained to this influence all at once. It ſeems rather to have been the work of time; and conſequently that their origin is to be traced much higher; though it is impoſſible to affirm any thing with certainty

tainty on a ſubject, where the only record that could give us any information is entirely ſilent. From this ſilence, however, the preſumption is, that, at whatever time, or from whatever cauſes, the office of a *prieſt* became venerable among the nations; this inſtitution, as peculiarly confined to an eſtabliſhed order eſſentially diſtinct from the people, holding a commiſſion, and poſſeſſed of powers not merely human, had not yet received the divine ſanction.

IT may be ſaid, that it did not fall in with the deſign of the hiſtorian to give an account of things at large, but only ſome general out-lines introductory to the eſtabliſhment of the family of Abraham. That this is the chief view of the ſacred writer, is readily admitted; but, as Moſes wrote more probably from immediate revelation, than from any traditions that might have been preſerved in the family of Abraham—it being far from probable that divine wiſdom ſhould reſt the authority of an original record upon tradition—it being even abſurd to ſuppoſe tradition of any kind a ſolid ground of divine faith through ſucceſſive ages, as it is hoped will appear with deciſive evidence afterwards—as Moſes, therefore, wrote from immediate revelation, it is difficult to conceive that God ſhould have made any diſcovery to the firſt inhabitants of the earth, concerning an inſtitution of ſuch importance to mankind, as the nature and extent of the prieſtly office and powers; and at the ſame time, that, in a ſubſequent revelation to be committed to writing, containing every thing from the creation downwards, and deſigned to remain as a ſtanding original record, not one hint ſhould have been given con-

cerning ſuch an inſtitution. The Almighty was now about to eſtabliſh a real prieſthood; to delegate an order of men honoured with ſingular powers, where his authority and the ſignal interpoſitions of his providence were to be viſible to all; and where the evidence of the divine ſanction depended not on the bold aſſeverations of deſigning men. If a ſimilar inſtitution had ever obtained, is it probable that we ſhould have had no notice concerning it; how long its authority remained, when and where it had been corrupted, and in what reſpects the firſt inſtitution was the ſame, or different from the ſubſequent one? The ſilence of the hiſtorian, therefore, we may hold a preſumption, not a *feeble*, but a *ſtrong* one, that the prieſthood, as limited by divine appointment to an excluſive order of men, had not, till the commencement of the Jewiſh Theocracy, received the divine ſanction. But, admitting that Moſes had his information wholly from tradition, can we ſuppoſe that a tradition which had preſerved an account of facts ſeemingly trivial in their nature, ſhould have failed in tranſmitting an account of one profeſſedly of the higheſt importance, of an inſtitution of ſuch univerſal concern? Could Noah have been ignorant of it? or would he, as a preacher of righteouſneſs, and in whoſe family the ſole powers of prieſthood, after the deluge, muſt have remained — would he, it is aſked, have neglected to perpetuate ſuch an eſtabliſhment agreeably to the divine appointment and model? or could ſuch an appointment and model, eſtabliſhed after the flood, have been forgotten by Abraham and his deſcendants, among whom it muſt have been particularly obſerved? or finally, could the order and ſucceſſion of prieſthood have been known

known and obſerved by them as a ſacred inſtitution, and no notice have been taken of it by the hiſtorian? Admitting therefore, that Moſes had his information from tradition, we are, on all the principles of probability, in other words, led to the ſame concluſion — that Levi and his ſons were the firſt who could claim the honour of prieſthood.

SECT. III.

OF THE IMPROBABILITY OF PRESERVING AN INSTITUTION OF PRIESTHOOD WITHOUT A WRITTEN RECORD.

IT may not be improper to inveſtigate this ſubject a little further, by enquiring what was moſt likely to be the ſtate of things, upon the ſuppoſition that the moſt rational forms of religious worſhip, and a regular order of prieſts had been inſtituted by immediate divine appointment, but without any written record to which a conſtant and unerring appeal could have been made. The queſtion then is, could ſuch an inſtitution have been preſerved, ſo as to enable us to judge with any certainty, or to give ſufficient ſatisfaction to the human mind concerning the divine origin of it, and its real ſimilitude to its antient form; what innovations might have been introduced, or what changes it might have undergone? The probability certainly is, that it could not. It is morally impoſſible it ſhould. Poſitive inſtitutions are ſubjected to innovations from a thouſand cauſes, which, if they are not ſufficient to change their

nature altogether, make them ſomething ſo different from their original form, that you cannot without the utmoſt difficulty mark any likeneſs. Even thoſe truths that are ſuppoſed to have been originally diſcovered by revelation, though agreeable to the natural feelings of the human mind, and founded on the ſoundeſt deductions of reaſon, cannot be tranſmitted through ſucceſſive generations without a perfect ſtandard to which we can appeal, but with the utmoſt danger of being greatly perverted, if not totally loſt. From the accounts of the Antediluvian age, it ſeems ſelf-evident that the moſt perfect oral inſtruction affords but very imperfect grounds of probability; that is, while perſons ſtill living, and of undoubted veracity, could atteſt the facts, and carry down through many centuries what they themſelves had been eye and ear witneſſes of; while they could unite the knowledge and experience of ſeven, eight, or nine hundred years as a direction to thoſe who were, more or leſs, their cotemporaries. When, under ſuch circumſtances of advantage, tradition proved utterly inadequate for preſerving juſt notions of God and his worſhip, what are we to look for afterwards — when human life became diminiſhed to a ſpan, when God confounded the language of men, and ſcattered them abroad upon the face of the earth — but fable and abſurdity? If at this period, the wickedneſs of men had become ſo great, that on this account, the inhabitants of the earth were driven as vagabonds without union, and incapable of intercourſe, ſo that they could not aſſiſt one another in forming, or tranſmitting one common or religious theory; what muſt have been the ſtate of the world in the courſe of ſucceeding ages, ſuppoſing an original

original inſtitution of prieſthood immediately appointed by God, or handed down from Noah — that the adminiſtration of certain ſacred rites and ordinances, and the performance of certain offices had been committed to a particular family, or one order of men excluſive of all others? It may be affirmed, on all the principles of probability, that if any traditions had remained concerning ſuch an inſtitution, they muſt have been ſo vague and imperfect; they muſt have been traced amidſt ſo many abſurdities, and even impieties; as to render it impoſſible, without a new diſcovery, to have eſtabliſhed upon this foundation any conſiſtent ritual or external form of worſhip. Nature alone — what principles of reaſon remained uncorrupted in the human mind — could have been conſulted with ſafety, without deriving the leaſt advantage from this ſuppoſed original diſcovery and inſtitution.

IT hath been admitted, that, from obſerving almoſt among all nations a ritual, however differing in others, agreeing in the common points of prieſt and ſacrifice, the mind would be naturally led to think, that ſacrifices had conſtituted a part of the antient religion, and that an order of men, called prieſts, had held a certain department in the public religious ſervice. But, from having ſeen an Egyptian or Carthaginean *prieſt*; or having witneſſed the vain and ridiculous, or the immoral, the unnatural, the barbarous rites that conſtituted their public worſhip, or were intended to appeaſe their deities; would it have been poſſible to have formed an idea of what a prieſt was before the flood? Could one have figured, it is aſked, what, at the diſperſion at Babel, their public ritual was, or in what manner it was con-

ducted? To what tribe the order of *prieſthood* belonged, in what manner prieſts were inſtalled, what preciſe department they held, or what authority belonged to them? The one certainly could lead him to no idea of the other. The fact is, a few poſitive precepts perhaps excepted, the firſt inhabitants of the earth ſeem to have been left to the original impreſſions of nature, which, by proper attention, were ſufficient to have directed to every neceſſary mode of worſhip: or if any particular revelation was originally vouchſafed, we have no intimation concerning it, except ſo far as relates to the grand promiſe of the *ſeed of the woman*. While this was kept in remembrance, and underſtood, nothing further was neceſſary.

SECT. IV.

OF THE NATURAL SUGGESTIONS OF THE HUMAN MIND ON THIS SUBJECT.

IT is impoſſible, perhaps, to affirm with abſolute certainty concerning the feelings and operations of the human mind in a ſtate greatly diſſimilar to our own; and yet we cannot ſuppoſe a reaſonable and moral being in circumſtances, in which we do not naturally figure to ourſelves, what ideas it muſt unavoidably form of its dependence and obligation, what hopes and fears muſt occupy its mind; and our concluſions in every caſe of this kind, are not deduced from mere theory or abſtract reaſoning, but from an analogy in the human mind, that ſeems immediately to lead us to judge, from a compariſon

pariſon with ourſelves. Thus, if we ſuppoſe the firſt inhabitants of the earth to have been impreſſed, whether from the internal frame of their own minds, or from revelation, with a ſenſe of deity, the beneficent author of nature, the moral and righteous governor of the world; while ſuch impreſſions remained, they would naturally be accompanied with correſpondent feelings; they would fill the heart with chearful gratitude and humble hope; gratitude from a ſenſe of dependence and obligation; hope founded on the benignity and goodneſs manifeſted ſo conſpicuouſly in the whole order of nature, in life, and the various bleſſings of it, and which they had not altogether rendered themſelves unworthy of. Theſe would appear to be the feelings of the human mind in a ſtate where the moral powers were not greatly depraved. And while we could ſuppoſe mankind to remain in this ſtate, religion, with regard to the external mode of it, would, no doubt, be very plain: — diveſted of every artificial ornament, and confined to a few obvious expreſſions of gratitude and devotion; or the ſimple obſervance of any religious rite the Almighty might appoint, or any public ſervice that ſocial worſhip might require. There would be no occaſion for an order of *prieſts*; no one amidſt the purity of ſuch impreſſions, and ſuch juſt and rational views of religion, would think of ſuch a character. A ſpiritual worſhip riſes ſuperior to every idea of this kind, and rejects every intermediate human office, except what public order and decency may render expedient, or neceſſary.—But when did this ſtate exiſt, wherein the moral powers were not greatly depraved? From the creation to the tranſlation of Enoch, I ſhould apprehend, containing a ſpace of

almoſt a thouſand years. As we can hardly ſuppoſe that the fall, whatever, upon the whole, might be the natural or moral conſequences of it, would deface the original features of the human mind, or obſcure any revelation concerning God and religious duty, ſo far as to leave no certain rule of conduct; we are naturally led to think, to whatever degree of wickedneſs individuals may have arrived, that the original impreſſions of divinity would not, all at once, be eraſed from the ſoul of man; and that with regard to communities, or diſtinct tribes, a ſenſe of moral obligation, and of the duties of natural religion in general, would diminiſh gradually. The ſcriptures no where lead the mind to a rapid tranſition from the ſtate of perfection, in knowledge and virtue, in which Adam was created, to the extremeties of ignorance and vice. Thoſe ſeeds of corruption, which were by ſin introduced into his natural and moral conſtitution, operated by gradual and progreſſive ſteps: in the one they iſſued in death, in the other in univerſal ignorance and depravity of manners.

BUT without inſiſting upon this, let us ſuppoſe mankind in a different ſtate,—in a ſtate of ignorance, degeneracy, and guilt; this very feeling, the ſource of devotion, gratitude, and hope, would produce a contrary effect—a ſlaviſh fear and dread of the Deity, from the apprehenſions of having expoſed ourſelves to his juſt diſpleaſure: and the mind, under the influence of groſs miſconceptions of the Divinity, and diſtreſſed with gloomy apprehenſions of impending juſtice; or deſirous to obtain certain bleſſing, or to avert certain evils, without knowing in what manner it ſhall proceed, will be infallibly

infallibly led to ſome external ritual, more or leſs abſurd according to its external complexion, the prejudices by which it may be influenced, and the ideas of that Supreme Power which it hath offended. But as man come to loſe ſight of the ſpiritual nature of religion, and ſubſtitute an external ritual in the place of it, which is ſuppoſed to render us acceptable to the Deity, the perſon employed in performing thoſe ceremonies, or officiating in thoſe forms, in which this ritual may conſiſt, will grow into a ſort of veneration, and be deemed ſacred; and the divine efficacy which is thought to accompany them, will either be gradually transferred to him, or be conſidered as inſeparably connected with his office. Now, a veneration founded on ignorance and fear will naturally encreaſe. Superſtition and credulity know no bounds; and a power in religion, being the ſupreme power, will be artfully preſerved, and ſtudiouſly improved. The multitude, influenced by cuſtom, and governed by authority, would quickly ſubmit to any eſtabliſhment which would make their conſciences eaſy, and, at the ſame time, leave them in quiet poſſeſſion of their favourite purſuits. The holy fraternity, leagued by intereſt and ambitious views, under various pretences, would aſſume new rights, and claim freſh dominion over the conſciences of their ſimple, ignorant, votaries. The Deity would be repreſented as too pure to hold immediate communication with profane worſhippers, and, therefore, acceſſible only through the intermediate offices of his holy miniſters.—And thus their deciſions would become ſacred; few being able to inveſtigate the truth, and fewer daring to diſpute with an order of men, now

ſuppoſed

ſuppoſed to be poſſeſſed of certain unalienable divine powers.

IN this manner alone, in a ſtate of general corruption, would ignorance and ſuperſtition—a ſlaviſh fear of the Deity, ariſing from a ſenſe of guilt, without a proper diſcovery of his moral perfections—operate on the mind, and lay the foundation of all that ſpiritual juriſdiction, and unlimited uſurpation, over the conſciences of men, which the pride or policy of *prieſts* have hitherto aimed at, or poſſeſſed. One ſtep would lead to another.—Now become neceſſary and venerable by their profeſſion, they would think of enlarging their ſphere of action, and by gradual advances would aſſume a direction in civil, as well as religious concerns; it being almoſt impoſſible to ſeparate theſe two.—He to whom I have ſubmitted my underſtanding and conſcience, without reſerve, in matters of greater concern, will think himſelf entitled to adviſe and direct me in thoſe of leſſer; and by yielding up the leading faculties of my mind, I have left myſelf no capacity of reſiſtance, ſhould he who pretends to adviſe and direct me, inſiſt on abſolute obedience; becauſe he has it always in his power to make a laſt and deciſive appeal to that faculty which I have already reſigned to him, and which is the ſupreme and final judge.—And in this manner things would probably go on, whether on the plan of natural or revealed religion, if we ſuppoſe that the one or the other is greatly corrupted, till, by ſome extraordinary interpoſition of Providence, the minds of men ſhould become enlightened, the knowledge of our duty as rational and moral agents, and that worſhip which is acceptable to the Deity ſhould be clearly exhibited;

bited; and the minds of men opened to impartial inquiry, and ſet free from every unnatural reſtraint.

How far this deſcription is a natural repreſentation of the progreſs of the human mind, from its firſt feelings, to the eſtabliſhment of a public ritual, and external mode of worſhip, of the origin and uſurpation of *prieſts*, and of the veneration they have acquired in every age from their deluded votaries, is readily ſubmitted to thoſe who can judge with propriety, and cenſure with candour. To ſome it may appear wholly chimerical. It may be ſo. They will be good enough, however, to point out ſome more probable origin of that eſtabliſhment we have endeavoured to ſearch for, ſo far as the antient record, and attention to the human mind could direct us. To others it may appear juſt, but drawn rather from experience, and what hath been obſerved, in fact, among the nations, than from any antecedent principles characteriſtic of our natures. That what we have here ſuppoſed to be the natural progreſs of the human mind, is agreeable to fact, and what experience hath every where diſcovered, where a *prieſthood* hath been eſtabliſhed amidſt univerſal ignorance and corruption of manners, is admitted: but it ſeems no leſs certain, that the principles taken notice of would produce the ſame effects, and, therefore, afford the moſt probable account that can be given of what experience and obſervation confirm.

SECT.

SECT. V.

OF THE DESIGN OF THE JEWISH PRIESTHOOD, AND THE NECESSITY OF A NEW REVELATION TO FIX OUR IDEAS ON THIS SUBJECT.

IT muſt be acknowledged that other cauſes, beſides an immediate diſcovery from God fixing a ſtandard of duty and worſhip, might combine to introduce a change in a national ſyſtem of religion. An ambitious political prince, raiſed above religious ſcruples, might mount the throne, chooſe to limit the powers of eccleſiaſtics, and touch their coffers: a people might be conquered, and obliged to receive their religion and laws from the point of the ſword: amidſt civil commotions, certain conceſſions might be made, where different parties had been ſtruggling with one another: or, amidſt the progreſs of ſcience, a ray of light might poſſibly dart forth, owing to different natural or political cauſes, and point out ſome of the more abſurd or pernicious opinions, or more groſs and ridiculous rites and practices. But, upon the whole, it may be affirmed, that whatever change might happen, would be a change, at beſt, but of one foolery or abſurdity for another. Eccleſiaſtics would either keep or regain their hold; and the minds of the multitude would be gradually prepared for new uſurpations. It is a fixed ſtandard alone, bearing the certain marks of divinity, that can prove ſufficient to aſcertain, with preciſion and authority, the boundaries between civil and eccleſiaſtical powers, the claims of *prieſts*, and the religious rights of mankind. That certain circumſtances may unite

unite to divert the attention of men, even from ſuch a ſtandard, and render it the means by which eccleſiaſtics may aſſume that very power which it diſclaims, experience will not permit us to doubt; but while itſelf remains uncorrupted, there are ſtill hopes, that, amidſt every partial and temporary impoſition, the human mind will be brought back again to its native vigour, and to vindicate its genuine rights.

THERE are only two religious ſyſtems, that can lay claim, with any probable degree of evidence, to divine authority — the Old and the New Teſtaments. The firſt hath been examined to the date of the Jewiſh theocracy; and it is preſumed, that a very little attention to that religious theory will eaſily ſatisfy the mind, that it could not be deſigned for perpetuity, nor can poſſibly be eſtabliſhed into a model. It was a ſyſtem of a very peculiar and extraordinary nature; intended, in the *firſt* place, to preſerve the deſcendants of Abraham from the idolatry of the nations, and thus to maintain the purity of the worſhip of the true God, and the eſſential duties of religion. Now, for this purpoſe, it was neceſſary that their public ritual ſhould bear as near a reſemblance as poſſible, without partaking of their folly or inhumanity, to the forms to which they had been accuſtomed, and which ſtill ſurrounded them on all ſides. They would have been immediately ſhocked by the appearance of a religion that had left nothing to ſtrike their ſenſes, or to correſpond with their former ideas. But while the ſame externals were exhibited, of temple and altar, of prieſt and ſacrifice, they would be more eaſily reconciled to what might appear to them but leſſer differences.

differences.—But, beſides preſerving them from idolatry by a ſimilarity of externals; by the frequent and ſignal interpoſitions of the ALMIGHTY, by which he appeared to act as the ſupreme magiſtrate in their commonwealth, added to the majeſty and glory of his houſe, and the diſtinguiſhing ſplendour and power of his miniſters, the minds of the people were overawed with a juſt and abiding ſenſe of the divinity; the name of JEHOVAH, as the true God, was made known among the heathens; and a counter-part to *their* worſhip was publicly and ſolemnly exhibited, that rendered all their idolatrous and ſuperſtitious machinery mean and contemptible, and that infinitely outdid every pretenſion of their *lying prieſts*.—Thus, the nations were made to fear and ſtand in awe, their deceiving miniſters were confounded, and an early light appeared in the Eaſt, ſufficient, at leaſt, to lead thoſe who were willing to be directed by it, to juſt notions of God and their duty.

BUT the New Teſtament gives us, in the *ſecond* place, a key that opens to a new view, and throws a light upon the darkeſt parts of this diſpenſation. It informs us, that the whole ceremonial was typical, "that the tabernacle was a figure, for the time preſent, which ſtood in carnal ordinances impoſed on them till the time of reformation, and which could not make them that did the ſervice perfect as pertaining to the conſcience:"—That in *itſelf* the whole ritual was to be conſidered as *beggarly elements*,—but as pointing at the future deſigns of Providence, *richly fraught* with *ſpiritual* bleſſings:—That it was deſigned not only for preſerving juſt notions of the true God, but likewiſe a deep ſenſe of guilt, for the

the expiating of which one was to appear in the end of the world — at once both the prieſt and the ſacrifice. "For the law was added becauſe of tranſgreſſion, till the ſeed ſhould come to whom the promiſe was made."— That, therefore, in the perſon of JESUS OF NAZARETH, who is "the end of the law to them that believe," the whole terminated as plainly expreſſed by an Apoſtle, — "When theſe things were *thus* ordained, the prieſts went always into the firſt tabernacle accompliſhing the ſervice of God; but into the ſecond went the high prieſt alone, once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himſelf and the errors of the people — but Chriſt being come an high prieſt of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands — by his own blood entered in *once* into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." *Prieſts*, and ſacrifices, and altars, therefore, are no more. "Our fathers worſhipped in this *mountain*, and in *Jeruſalem* ye ſay is the place where men ought to worſhip — Jeſus ſaith, Believe me, the hour cometh, and now is, when ye ſhall neither worſhip in this *mountain*, nor yet at *Jeruſalem*; but when the true worſhippers ſhall worſhip the father in *ſpirit* and in *truth*." Thus, it is demonſtratively evident, that we have nothing to do with this diſpenſation, with the order of its prieſts, or the forms of its worſhip. Its whole value reſts on the importance of the evidence it furniſhes for its own diſſolution — the fulfillment of the types, and the accompliſhment of the prophecies in the perſon of JESUS, which prove that he is the CHRIST. For with regard to what is moral, it reſts upon its own foundation,

dation, it is of perpetual obligation, and muſt be the ſame under every divine diſpenſation.

To the religion of Chriſt, therefore, we muſt appeal. We have no other law or directory. Here we muſt learn, if there is any external mode of worſhip preſcribed, what rites and ceremonies are peculiar to it, how far they bind the conſcience, and are of a perpetual nature; if an order of *prieſthood* is eſtabliſhed, with what powers they are entruſted, and what is the extent of their commiſſion; whether in religion every thing is perſonal, and the right of every individual, at leaſt till it is by common conſent transferred to one or more; or whether, with regard to certain acts neceſſary to ſalvation, we muſt depend upon the intermediate miniſtry of others, to whom the excluſive right of performing them is committed by an immediate divine inſtitution. Theſe are queſtions, ſurely, of the higheſt and moſt ſerious concern. To throw ſome light, therefore, on a ſubject of ſuch infinite importance, is the deſign of the following chapters. And to pave the way, by ſetting aſide every adventitious authority, it will be neceſſary to ſhew, that the Scriptures are the only rule of faith, and can have no dependence on any human traditions.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

OF TRADITION.

SECT I.

Of the importance of the question.

IT may be thought, perhaps, that the queſtion concerning tradition, is a queſtion with the papiſts only; but this would be a miſtake; though even in this point of view, it would not ceaſe to be a queſtion of great importance, conſidering the growth of popery in theſe kingdoms, for almoſt a century paſt, and that a deciſion of this ſingle point, without deſcending to particulars, would go well nigh to ſhake the foundation of this formidable fabric. For, as clear as noon day, if the Scriptures are a perfect and excluſive rule of faith, popery reſts its diſtinguiſhing doctrines on a falſe bottom, and is a moſt preſumptuous impoſition upon the faith of chriſtians. But, ſetting popery aſide from the queſtion, whoever is at the pains to attend to the nature of ſeveral tenets, opinions, and uſages, maintained by proteſtants, and by which they have expoſed their cauſe to the ſame objections from every ſober and impartial inquirer, with popery itſelf, will immediately perceive, that they derive their weight, not from the Scriptures, not from the reaſon of the human mind, but from a very different ſource — from antiquity: that is, from the practice of

what they are pleaſed to call the primitive church, from the writings of ſome venerable father, or from the deciſion of ſome national or general council: in ſhort, from ſome quarter or other, which, in the laſt reſort, may be properly reſolved into human authority.

FROM whatever cauſe it ariſeth, there ſeems to be in the minds of men ſome ſecret miſgivings, that the New Teſtament is not a foundation, broad and ſecure enough to reſt their faith wholly on; and till theſe miſgivings are fairly removed, by eſtabliſhing the authority of the Scriptures, as a perfect and infallible rule of faith, independent upon every tradition, every practice, however hoary with age, or venerable from cuſtom — independent upon every human doctrine, though ſupported by the greateſt authority on earth; we ſhall never be diſpoſed to pay them that reverence which they deſerve, nor to commit our cauſe wholly to them. But bring men once to place unlimited confidence in the Divine Record; emancipate the mind fairly from the ſhackles of human authority, and the word of God would run and be glorified; credulity would be converted into rational inquiry, ſuperſtition and ridiculous forms into liberal devotion, and every traditionary doctrine, or practice, introduced as an eſſential part of religion, would be treated as a baſe deſign to leſſen the credit of the authenticated canon, and to enſlave the conſciences of men, by ſubſtituting in the place of it an uſurped authority.—Some obſervations, therefore, upon this ſubject, are humbly offered to the reader, which, if they are not neceſſary to thoſe to whom it may appear ſufficiently plain, it is hoped, will be excuſed for the ſake

of

of others, who may have beſtowed leſs attention upon it.

SECT. II.

OF THE DESIGN OF COMMITTING THE SACRED ORACLES TO WRITING.

IT deſerves particular attention in this diſquiſition, that the great deſign of committing the ſacred oracles to writing was, not merely to be a ſtandard to which the age in which they were written might appeal, but every ſucceeding age. They ſeem particularly deſigned in this *latter* view; becauſe the chriſtians, to whom the inſpired writers addreſs themſelves, are every where ſuppoſed to be well acquainted with the diſtinguiſhing facts, and doctrines of their religion; thoſe at Rome excepted, to whom, therefore, the Apoſtle ſaw it neceſſary to give an account of chriſtianity more at large, as a ſyſtem which they had, yet, but an imperfect knowledge of. He writes not to admoniſh, or put them in mind of doctrines that had been formerly taught and explained to them, but to inform them of things of which hitherto they ſeem to have been, in a great meaſure, ignorant: but, at the ſame time, he expreſſes himſelf with a freedom and confidence, which evidently aroſe, from the full knowledge and conviction, that the doctrines which he explains and enforces were generally believed, and, at the ſame time, received among chriſtians. The deſign of the written record, therefore, was chiefly to be a perfect and permanent ſtandard, by which the body of chriſtians might be enabled to judge, with certainty,

between doctrines revealed, and authoriſed by God, and every human pretenſion, to the end of the world. This concluſion cannot be got over, but upon one or other of theſe ſuppoſitions — That the ſacred penmen were not, at the time of writing, ſufficiently inſtructed in the chriſtian ſyſtem — That they had forgotten ſome things of importance, which they afterwards called to their remembrance, and delivered orally to be tranſmitted by tradition — or, that they judged tradition a manner of conveying facts, and doctrines, equally certain; and, in every future age, as much to be depended upon, as committing them to writing. Let us examine into each of theſe.

WITH regard to the *firſt*, then, there can be no doubt. The ſacred writers were fully inſtructed. They were with their Lord on all occaſions, they ſaw all his miracles, they heard all his diſcourſes; and they had opportunity to be thoroughly ſatisfied by after-inquiry, where through their own weakneſs and prejudices, they could not readily enter into the ſpirit, or perceive the deſign, tendency, or extent of his doctrines. Before his departure from them, he opened their underſtanding, that they ſhould underſtand the Scriptures; and was ſeen of them, after his reſurrection, forty days ſpeaking of the things that pertain to the kingdom of God. — The Apoſtle Paul, who writes more than all the other Apoſtles, not being a fellow attendant with the other diſciples on their Lord, was called afterwards, in an extraordinary manner, and immediately taught from heaven. — The Apoſtles, therefore, had every advantage

tage neceſſary to a knowing and faithful diſcharge of their office.

NOR, in the *ſecond* place, was it poſſible for them to have forgotten the divine inſtructions they received, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghoſt, which the Father will ſend in my name, he ſhall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatſoever I have ſaid unto you." So that had they been partially inſtructed during their Lord's continuance with them, they were afterwards under the guidance of the unerring ſpirit of knowledge and truth.

IF any thing, then, of importance to be known was omitted, it muſt of neceſſity, in the *laſt* place, have been owing to *this* — that thoſe ſacred writers were of opinion, that this *omiſſion* might be ſupplied with equal certainty and advantage by *tradition*. This is the capital point, and on which, it ſhould appear, that the final deciſion of this queſtion muſt reſt. — And *here* an attempt ſhall be made, from every reaſon that can ſatisfy the human mind, to prove that the inſpired penmen neither did, nor could have intended ſuch a manner of conveyance.

SECT. III.

OF THE ABSURDITY OF SUPPOSING A DOUBLE RULE OF FAITH — ONE WRITTEN — THE OTHER TRADITIONAL.

IT will be allowed, on all hands, that to deliver doctrines, or an account of facts and tranſactions orally, is by far more eaſy than to commit them to writ-

ing: ſo that he who ſits down to write a book or epiſtle containing ſuch doctrines, facts, or tranſactions, muſt be ſuppoſed to do it under this conviction — that the method he purſues is neceſſary for preſerving the memory, and tranſmitting to future ages a juſt narrative, and an impartial account of them. Now, it will be likewiſe admitted, that men calling themſelves the apoſtles of Jeſus Chriſt, have committed to writing the tranſactions of his life, beſides other facts and doctrines of the higheſt importance. In this caſe, they either did conſider writing as a more certain manner of conveyance than tradition, or, I deſire to know, why they came to write at all? Their time ſeems to have been but ill employed, if, with greater eaſe to themſelves, and equal ſecurity to mankind, they might have committed the whole into the boſom of the *church*, by her to have been faithfully communicated to her implicit ſons. — It ſeems, at leaſt, difficult to juſtify the conduct of the ſacred penmen, if tradition is to be conſidered as on a foot with writing. They, certainly ought, either to have written nothing at all, or to have written the whole: nothing, if tradition can give equal aſſurance to the human mind with a written record: the whole, if writing is not only the beſt ſecurity, but the only credible evidence. Their having committed any thing at all to writing, therefore, is a moral demonſtration, that they have committed the whole, and truſted nothing to another channel. Let it not be ſaid, that the Apoſtles might have, occaſionally, delivered things orally to certain chriſtian ſocieties, to whom they have not written at all: for what the Apoſtles *might* have done we know not, but ſo far as we are informed of what they did. But ſuppoſing the fact,

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would they have delivered to one ſociety of chriſtians doctrines or practices of univerſal obligation, which they had, in no part of their writings to the other churches, taken notice of? Were the many to ſubmit to the authority of the few? Were the churches to whom the Apoſtles had particularly written, to take a report, at ſecond hand, from others to whom they had not written at all?—Or could the infallible inſpired preachers ſeriouſly intend to bind the conſciences of the chriſtians to whom they wrote, and the conſciences of chriſtians in every future age, by doctrines, practices, or inſtitutes of any kind, without one intimation in all their epiſtles, that they had done ſo, in what manner they were to be tranſmitted, what were their importance and obligation, and what marks of credibility they were to carry in them? On the anſwer to theſe queſtions we might reſt the deciſion of this argument; but as it is a capital one, and it is hoped will appear plain, at the ſame time, to every reader, we beg leave to explain our ideas, and throw a little light further upon it, by the following plain illuſtration.

LET us put the caſe, then, that one writes a book to preſerve the memory of ſome recent tranſaction, or ſome important diſcovery to mankind; but wherein certain things are of deſign omitted, no leſs important and neceſſary to be known than thoſe with which the public is made acquainted; nay, without which the knowledge of every other diſcovery or tranſaction would be imperfect.—That, in order to ſupply this defect, the author did intend, at the time of writing, another channel of conveyance, and had actually committed the ſecret to a

ſelect few, by them to be communicated to the public at diſcretion; without one reſtriction as to time, place, or manner. On this ſuppoſition, what opinion ſhould we form of the writer? That he was a fool, or a knave, beyond all doubt: moſt probably that he was a knave; and that, whatever he might pretend, or whatever apology his friends might offer for him, he had ſomething farther in view than to eſtabliſh a faithful repoſitory for the public.—That there muſt have been a ſerious and deliberate deſign of putting ſomething into the hands of favourites, of which they might avail themſelves:—That their intereſt was more at heart with him than the benefit of the public; and, rather than fruſtrate this end, he was willing to riſque the abuſe, if not the total loſs, of this diſcovery to mankind. Who, poſſeſſed of the leaſt degree of diſcernment, would heſitate a moment in pronouncing ſuch a writer, be who he will, a deſigning knave?—Or, put the caſe, that one ſhould ſend a letter to a friend, informing him of matters of great importance, in which he was immediately and nearly intereſted, and this with all the attention and warmth that honeſt zeal could poſſibly inſpire; and yet, without giving one hint concerning it in his whole letter, ſhould intend to truſt the bearer with many things of great conſequence relative to the ſame ſubject, and, without which, the letter could not anſwer the intention of the writer with regard to the capital information deſigned by it;—nay more, without the interpretation of the bearer, that the letter itſelf could not poſſibly be underſtood: what judgment, it is aſked, would any man of common ſenſe deliver upon it?—That the writer was a fool:—he could deliver no other. And yet who does

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not ſee that your traditionary pretences throw the ſame imputation of knavery or folly on the ſacred writers?—Here is a record, ſuppoſed to be divine, written on purpoſe to preſerve the memory of the moſt important tranſactions; a diſcovery of facts and doctrines, of infinitely more concern to mankind than any human diſcovery whatever.—The New Teſtament is a letter from Chriſt, and his Apoſtles, concerning a new and gracious ſcheme of ſalvation to guilty men; who are addreſſed with all the attention to their ſpiritual concerns, all the importunity and fervour of ſpirit that the fulneſs of divine affection can poſſibly expreſs; who are inſtructed, admoniſhed, and, in particular, are guarded againſt deceivers and falſe ſpirits pretending to *another* goſpel; and yet by this claim to tradition, they are ſuppoſed to have left both doctrines and practices neceſſary to ſalvation, to be publiſhed, at ſecond hand, and to be tranſmitted orally through ſucceſſive generations: they are ſuppoſed to have written things by halves, and then to have eſtabliſhed truſtees for ſupplying their defects. This would be ſuch an imperfection in the Apoſtolic writings, and render them a rule of faith ſo precarious, as muſt neceſſarily leſſen our eſteem, if not ſtrike at the credit of them altogether.

SECT. IV.

OF THE IMPERFECTION AND UNCERTAINTY OF TRADITION IN GENERAL, AS A GROUND OF CREDIBILITY.

THE practice of all civilized nations is ſufficient to convince us, that they have judged tradition a channel

channel no ways adequate for tranſmitting hiſtory, ſcience, or law; becauſe no event of any importance, no diſcovery of any benefit to mankind, no laws formed to regulate ſociety have been, in fact, left to reſt on ſo precarious a foundation. No ſooner do we find a people emerging from a ſtate of ignorance and barbariſm; no ſooner doth the dawn of knowledge and improvement appear, than we perceive the hiſtorical page beginning to unfold itſelf, and ſome public code, however imperfect, to be eſtabliſhed — facts collected from the beſt traditional authority — laws that depended on cuſtom alone, converted into a written common law, with ſuch alterations and additions as appeared, at that time, neceſſary for the publick ſecurity and happineſs. Or if cuſtoms obtain in any country that ſtill have the force of law, and are conſidered as a ſupplement to the public code, they are ſuch as appear not inconſiſtent with the written law, and by univerſal precedent are ſo fixed and explained, in every poſſible caſe, that they cannot be miſtaken. No wiſe people, where the uſe of letters had been known, ever did, or could think of leaving laws, upon which the public order and utility depended, to be handed down by tradition; much leſs is there a caſe to be found, where they have committed to writing certain laws, and left others of equal importance to be tranſmitted orally to poſterity; ſtill leſs, where they have been entruſted into the hands of a few, with an excluſive privilege of explaining and declaring what their nature, extent, and obligation ſhould be; who from every motive of intereſt and ambition that could bias the human mind, would be led to impoſe upon the public.

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As the laws of all civilized nations being committed to writing is a demonſtration, on the one hand, that they had judged tradition an imperfect and uncertain manner of conveyance; on the other, the fables and abſurd theology, the unconnected facts, the marvellous, and incredible abounding in every nation, where, either the art of writing had been unknown, or uncultivated, is a demonſtration no leſs clear, that little or no credit is to be given to the moſt perfect accounts tranſmitted this way. Experience will enable us to bring the matter ſtill nearer home, and within a narrower compaſs. It will ſhew us, that evidence, even at firſt hand, when men are under the power of prejudices, or have any intereſt to deceive, deſerves but little credit: nay, which is more inexplicable, it will ſhow that, where there can be no proſpect of intereſt, no prejudices ariſing from ill will or oppoſition, there appears in the human mind a ſtrong propenſity to falſify, to invert, to add, to diminiſh, or to throw a falſe gloſs over the plaineſt facts; ſo that ſeldom the ſame ſtory is told the ſame way, though it hath happened in our time, — yeſterday, — in our very neighbourhood. Upon what principles, then, are we to conclude that credit is due to tales that have paſſed through the hands of thouſands, all having a common intereſt to deceive? or, ſuppoſing that they have been told the ſame way immemorially, how ſhall we trace them to their original, or arrive at any certainty concerning the authenticity of them? neither the conſiſtency of a ſtory in itſelf, nor its antiquity, nor both, are a ſufficient ground of credibility, without being further aſcertained when it was firſt broached, and by whom: what evidence, at that time, was laid before the public, and in what

what manner it was received, and came to acquire credit —and this we may venture to ſay, with regard to traditions, in general, and with regard to the traditions in queſtion, in particular, is impoſſible. Let us, even, ſuppoſe that we could tell the perſons by their names, characters, and places of abode, who pretend firſt to have received traditions from the apoſtles, or from others who had received them from the apoſtles at firſt, ſecond, or third hand; or by revelation immediately — let us ſuppoſe that we could preciſely ſay, where, when, and by whom this or that tradition was firſt uſhered into the light, and under pretence of what authority; it would all amount to nothing as a rule of faith, which muſt ultimately reſt on the divine record either immediately, as to what it contains, or mediately, by authoriſing us to transfer our faith, in particular circumſtances, to human authority — eſpecially if we add that all eccleſiaſtical traditions are ſo diſtant from, ſo inconſiſtent with the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, and ſo entirely calculated to aggrandize the *Church*, that they exhibit a ſtronger internal evidence of their being ſpurious — the artful fabrication of *prieſts*, than could ariſe from every other argument.

SECT. III.

OF THE ABUSE WITH REGARD TO DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES IN THE PRIMITIVE AGES OF CHRISTIANITY.

WHAT hath been advanced under the foregoing ſection will appear with additional evidence, if we obſerve, that in the very times of the apoſtles themſelves, no ſmall part of the churches they had planted, inſtead

inſtead of being pure and faithful repoſitories of the precious truths they had been carefully inſtructed in, was become infected with the moſt futile conceits, and moſt dangerous errors; and, on the apoſtolic foundation, had reared up a heterogeneous ſuperſtructure of pagan, and Jewiſh materials. No admonitions, though under the immediate eye of one or other of theſe extraordinary miniſters, could preſerve them from corrupting the ſimplicity of the goſpel. If they had been converted from Judaiſm, with what difficulty were they brought to depart from circumciſion, from meats, from drinks, from holy days, and new moons, and this after their errors and danger were repeatedly ſet before them? Many who profeſſed Chriſtianity, after every remonſtrance adhered obſtinately to theſe, and maintained them with greater zeal and ſtrictneſs than its moſt diſtinguiſhing and important doctrines. If from heatheniſm—the ſame propenſity appeared in adopting pagan tenets, and conforming to their modes of worſhip; feaſting in their temples, eating things offered to idols, and a voluntary humility in worſhipping angels. "Stand faſt in the liberty wherewith Chriſt hath made you free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage. Behold I Paul ſay unto you, that if ye be circumciſed Chriſt ſhall avail you nothing; for I teſtify to every man that is circumciſed that he is a debtor to the whole law — How turn ye to weak and beggarly elements, ye obſerve days, and months, and times, and years; I am afraid of you, leſt I have beſtowed labour in vain — I marvel that ye are ſo ſoon removed into another goſpel — Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worſhipping of angels — The things that the gentiles ſacrifice, they

ſacrifice

ſacrifice unto idols, and I would not that ye ſhould have fellowſhip with devils. — Flee from idolatry." Now, if it was ſo difficult to preſerve the firſt churches under the influence, even, of an extraordinary diſpenſation of Providence, and the immediate direction of infallible guides, from dangerous errors both in doctrine and practice, what was to be looked for when *they* were gone? Where the unhappy influences of a ſpirit of prejudice, novelty, and innovation had already ſo remarkably appeared; what was to be looked for but that the written record itſelf, however plain and definitive with regard to every article of faith and duty, would prove inſufficient to correct, and reſtrain ſuch a diſpoſition? — That notions and tenets would be broached and propagated, and particular rites, practices and uſages, ſupported by certain explications of ſcripture, with which in fact they had no concern, or by apoſtolic practice and authority would be recommended; wherein one ſociety of chriſtians would differ from another, according to the notions and views of their reſpective leaders. As this is what might have been looked for, from minds under the prepoſſeſſion of ſo different, and often contradictory religious tenets, before their converſion to chriſtianity; ſuch were in reality the effects, immediately to be taken notice of, which early appeared among the chriſtian ſectaries; among whom we obſerve ſo much *arrogance* and *enthuſiaſm*, on the one hand, ſo much *credulity* and *ſuperſtition*, on the other, that thoſe only, who have read the hiſtory of the firſt centuries can believe it. I ſhall preſent the reader, unacquainted with this ſubject, with an example of both.

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THE divine Ignatius ſhall furniſh the *firſt*, where the inquiſitive may find a curious ſpecimen of primitive chriſtianity. "All of you, ſays he, in his epiſtle to Smyrna, follow after the Biſhop, as Jeſus Chriſt follows the Father.—Let no man without the Biſhop do any of thoſe things that ought to be done in the church.—Let that worſhip be accounted lawful, which is either performed by the Biſhop himſelf, or permitted by him.—Whatſoever he approves is acceptable unto God." In his epiſtle to Polycarp.—"Attend to the Biſhop as God doth to you, my ſoul for ſuch as obey the Biſhop, preſbyters, and deacons, and with ſuch let me have my portion in God." In his epiſtle to the Epheſians:—"Let us manifeſt that we ought to receive the Biſhop as the Lord." To the Magneſians:—"Study to do all things in the concord of God, the Biſhop preſiding in the place of God, the preſbyters in the place of the council of the Apoſtles, and my moſt ſweet deacons having committed to them the ſervice of Chriſt:—Therefore, as the Lord doth nothing without the Father, being one with him, ſo do ye nothing without the Biſhop and the preſbyters." In his epiſtle to the Philadelphians:—"As many as remain with the Biſhop, theſe belong to God in Chriſt Jeſus—I had this knowledge from no man, but the ſpirit preached, ſaying, without the Biſhop ſee that ye do nothing." Once more, in his epiſtle to the Trallians:—"Let all reverence the Deacons as the command of Chriſt Jeſus, the Biſhop as Jeſus Chriſt, and the preſbytery as the council of God and the ſenate of the Apoſtles, without which there is no church—I am not bound in any reſpect, but can be able to know things heavenly, the orders of Angels, their conſtitutions, principalities,

cipalities, things viſible and inviſible." Was ever ſuch wild raving heard from a man in his ſober ſenſes?

I AM ſufficiently aware, at the ſame time, that theſe very paſſages, the effuſions of a diſordered brain as they may appear to thoſe who take their religious creed entirely from the ſcriptures, have, by the patrons of the hierarchy, and the ſticklers for ſacerdotal power, been conſidered as an ineſtimable treaſure, and quoted with mighty triumph. And, perhaps, it may be thought, by ſome of more moderate and rational principles, that ſo early a claim to ſuperiority and direction, by a man ſo highly revered for ſanctity, cannot fail to have ſome weight.

BEFORE we proceed, therefore, we beg leave to offer the following conſiderations to the attention of the candid reader, — That, a man's having had an opportunity of knowing the mind of the Apoſtles, does not afford us ſufficient evidence that he was, in fact, properly informed, did not labour under ſome miſtake, or was not influenced by other motives than the knowledge and love of the truth. The Goſpel was preached to all the churches in its moſt pure and ſimple ſtate, in ſpirit and in power; by a divine commiſſion, and with the promiſe of ſucceſs: did they therefore obey the truth? did not a ſpirit of innovation and error, as we have had already occaſion to obſerve, appear with unconquerable obſtinacy, after every apoſtolic remonſtrance and admonition? and are we to wonder if one man, amidſt all his advantages of information, and reputed ſanctity, ſhould have been led into errors? The apoſtles had magnified *their* office; are

are we to wonder, that, in ſuch circumſtances, the whole dignity and power which they claimed ſhould be tranſferred to the ſucceeding order of eccleſiaſtics; where the office in general bore ſuch a ſimilarity? are we even to wonder, that religious enthuſiaſm mingling with the human paſſions ſhould have led to a few unguarded expreſſions that ſeem to carry the point ſtill higher than the apoſtles themſelves had done? If you are to ſearch for the time when religious fervours, and a heated imagination are likelieſt to operate upon the mind, and hurry men away before their underſtandings are ſufficiently informed, and their views corrected by different obſervations, you will find it in the violence of firſt impreſſions, and the ſucceeding ferments of a newly awakened zeal. The mind, in ſuch circumſtances, is raiſed above its native tone, and ſcorns the cool boundaries of reaſon and moderation. Neither, therefore, the ſuppoſed ſanctity, nor the antiquity of this father's teſtimony are, of themſelves, ſufficient to render his authority valid.

BUT in every queſtion of this kind, there is one of two things neceſſary, I apprehend, to ſatisfy every fair inquirer:—That a writer's teſtimony is properly ſupported by the Scriptures;—or, that it carry the marks of credibility in itſelf. With reſpect to the *firſt*, it will no doubt be urged, in the preſent caſe; that, however arrogant theſe expreſſions may appear to be, or however aſſuming the ſacerdotal claim implied in them, they are ſufficiently juſtified by the words of our Lord himſelf:—"He that heareth you heareth me, and he that deſpiſeth you deſpiſeth me." Now if theſe words,

which it is acknowledged, expreſs a very high authority, be, indeed, a good plea for the venerable father, or hath any argument in it for the pretenſions of prieſts, why ſtop ſhort without taking in the whole extent of the commiſſion? "Behold I give unto you power to tread on ſerpents and ſcorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing ſhall by any means hurt you." This is certainly comprehended in the original commiſſion: why then not include both parts of it as they ſtand connected together, and ſerve to explain one another? But as this would exceed the higheſt prerogative that Eccleſiaſtics have aſſumed, it may be thought more modeſt to plead on the laſt commiſſion given to Apoſtles, and which, it may be ſaid, deſcends in all its force, and extent, to every miniſter of religion to the end of the world — or, at leaſt, to Biſhops, the ſucceſſors of the Apoſtles, agreeably to the plain words of it, "Lo I am with you even to the end of the world." And again, "The glory which thou gaveſt me, I have given them, that they may be one, as we are one." To ſhow the fallacy of every argument of this kind deduced from theſe, or any ſimilar texts of Scripture, it is only neceſſary here to obſerve, *firſt*, that it is evident, from fact, that this commiſſion to the Apoſtles did not deſcend in all its force, and extent, to any ſucceeding Eccleſiaſtic, or order of Eccleſiaſtics, even in the age immediately ſucceeding the Apoſtles; and it will be allowed, on all hands, that, ſo far as it regards viſible and extraordinary powers, the efficacy of it hath ceaſed for upwards, at leaſt, of fourteen centuries, without one pretence of performing works above the ordinary ſtandard of humanity, where ignorance and ſuperſtition had not afforded

afforded an eaſy opportunity for every *prieſtly* deluſion: ſo that this commiſſion, if it reſpects modern Eccleſiaſtics, is indiſputably limited in the order of Providence; and how far this limitation extends, and what powers are derived from it, is the only queſtion—a queſtion which we ſhall have occaſion to diſcuſs in the ſequel at large. *Secondly*, the glory which Chriſt gave his Apoſtles was neither the ſame in kind, in *every* reſpect, nor in degree, in *any*, with what he had received from the Father; not can it be pretended, from what hath been obſerved, that it was the ſame, in *either* view, that the Apoſtles gave to the ſucceeding miniſters of religion: ſo that all ſuch Scriptural authorities are utterly vague and indefinite with regard to the tranſmiſſion of Eccleſiaſtic powers—They either juſtify the claim to every Apoſtolic power, or to none.

BUT what have the Scriptures to do in this matter? The good father doth not ſo much as claim this authority: he ſoars higher, "He had knowledge of it from *no man*, but the *ſpirit* preached, ſaying, without the Biſhop ſee that ye do nothing." Now do not imagine, reader, that this preaching is the preaching of the Apoſtolic word, or information in any ſhape communicated by the Apoſtles, which, in a general ſenſe, may be called the preaching of the ſpirit. By no means; for the Apoſtles were men, and ſpoke and acted as men, however aided by the ſpirit; but *he* had the knowledge of it from *no man*. He had it, therefore, by immediate revelation from God, which rendered every other ſtandard not only unneceſſary, but made diſcoveries to him of which the Scriptures give no account. "I am not bound

in any reſpect, but can be able to know things heavenly, the order of Angels, their conſtitutions, principalities, things viſible and inviſible." Who, after ſo modeſt a teſtimony in his own favour, would be bold enough to call in queſtion the authority of this champion for the hierarchy?

THE *ſecond* thing neceſſary to ſupport the credit of a writer is, that what he aſſerts carries the marks of credibility in itſelf — if it is a fact, that it is not improbable — if it is a doctrine, that it is not repugnant to our ideas of God, as the moral and righteous governor of the world; or to the nature of man, as a moral and accountable agent. Now, the queſtion before us is, whether it be conſiſtent with thoſe ideas, to ſuppoſe any denomination of men on earth, whether biſhop, preſbyter, or deacon, veſted with thoſe unlimited powers, which this writer would aſcribe to thoſe characters? It is here ſuppoſed, that the *Biſhop* is to the *flock*, over which he preſides, what the *Father* is to the *Son*, which, without ſuppoſing the Biſhop poſſeſſed of infallible and uncontroulable powers, is perfectly abſurd. Now to ſuppoſe a Biſhop, as ſuch, veſted with unlimited and uncontroulable powers, and without which the argument can be of no avail to Eccleſiaſtics; — that is to account every act of worſhip lawful which he performs, and to believe that whatever he approves is acceptable unto God: — is an unlimited confidence which no man owes to another, and is utterly inconſiſtent with our rational and moral powers; and, therefore, utterly inconſiſtent with every idea of that wiſe and moral Being who hath endowed us with them. — The Apoſtle Paul himſelf claimed

claimed no more, than that the churches ſhould be followers of him, as he was of Jeſus Chriſt;—not as Jeſus Chriſt was of the Father. They claimed obedience *in the Lord*, that is, agreeably to the evidence they exhibited of their divine commiſſion, and the inſtructions they had delivered to the different ſocieties of chriſtians by authority from their Lord; and therefore cannot be ſuppoſed, as ſhall be more fully explained afterwards, to have given unlimited and unconditional powers to any man, or number of men, to propoſe new articles of faith, or new rules of obedience to chriſtians in any future period.

BUT, however men may be led through ignorance, enthuſiaſm, prejudices, or party views, to pervert doctrines, it may be thought, that practices or inſtitutes are by no means expoſed to the ſame danger, and, therefore, that traditions relative to theſe might with ſafety have been committed to the primitive ſocieties of chriſtians, and with unlimited confidence, and abſolute ſecurity, received from them.—We have a direct proof of the contrary, and how far a ſuperſtitious credulity prevailed, in the grand controverſy concerning the celebration of Eaſter; an early controverſy that divided the eaſtern and weſtern churches:—Polycarp, in the one, alledging the authority of John, whoſe diſciple he had been:—Anicetus, in the other, that of Peter and Paul. "Here, ſays a judicious writer, it is moſt remarkable, how, even, in the moſt early times they heaped falſehood upon falſehood, and ſupported one forgery with another. The fable of Peter's being at Rome, and of conjuring Simon Magus there, was even then begun to obtain;

whereof the Romaniſts made their advantage, and began to aſcribe to him ſome headſhip over the reſt; and then averred, that he had appointed them, not only to celebrate Eaſter, but alſo had enjoined them to keep it on the *fifteenth*, and not on the *fourteenth* day of the month, as did the eaſtern churches. Now that they, in their turn, might be even with the Romaniſts, and meet them after their own faſhion and arts, the Aſians invented the like legends of the Apoſtle John, who, as they alledged, died at Epheſus, and enjoined them to keep Eaſter on the *fourteenth* day, but *by no means* on the *fifteenth:* and the better to ſet off the fable, Polycarpus of Epheſus, in his letter to Victor, harangues the praiſes of John, that thereby they may be induced to prefer him to Peter; and ſticks not to aſſert, that John was a prieſt, and wore a high prieſt's golden crown: and yet, it is acknowledged, that John was not of the prieſtly race, and far leſs was the high prieſt, to whom, of all the prieſts ſuch a crown was peculiar."—Now here it is to be obſerved, that the probability is, that there were not any ſuch injunctions left to one or other of the churches concerning the celebration of Eaſter. It is an inſtitution no where mentioned in the New Teſtament. The word is not to be found, but in one place, "Intending after Eaſter to bring him forth to the people," and where, it is evident, that the plain Engliſh ought to have been, after the paſſover.—But ſuppoſing the fact, that certain injunctions and directions had been given by one, or more Apoſtles, concerning the time, manner, and obligation of obſerving this inſtitution; we evidently ſee, from this early and violent oppoſition, that it is impoſſible to arrive at any certainty, where the

the written record doth not furniſh a plain and unerring ſtandard.—The chief leaders in religion had ſo early run wild after their own fancies, or were led to deviate from the Scriptures to ſupport ſome political views, or ſome favourite ſyſtem of their own; that neither doctrines not inſtitutions could have been ſafe in their hands.—While chriſtianity was yet in its infancy, the *enemy* had begun to ſcatter tares among the wheat; and thus, gradually, to collect materials for rearing up the monſtrous fabrick of the *myſtery of iniquity:* ſo that, if the ſacred writings, by the ſignal interpoſition and ſuperintendency of Providence, had not been preſerved ſo genuine and unadulterated, that their authenticity is admitted on all hands, it would have been impoſſible to have known what to have admitted, or what to have rejected; what had been originally the revelation of God, or what, under that ſacred authority, through weakneſs had been adopted, or by policy had been impoſed upon mankind.

IN illuſtration and ſupport of this argument, we may, with propriety, obſerve here, that the ſame pretenſions to traditions, and the ſame abuſe of them appeared in the Jewiſh church.—The Jews were poſſeſſed of the only written inſpired law; a law given with the utmoſt ſolemnity, and held in the moſt profound veneration; a law which deſcended to the moſt minute circumſtances of worſhip, and ſufficiently definitive with regard to moral and political duties; a law which they were at liberty, neither to add to, nor diminiſh from: "The book of the law ſhall not depart from thy mouth, but thou ſhalt meditate thereon day and night;—ye ſhall

not add to the word of this commandment, neither ſhall ye diminiſh from it." But could this people be reſtrained from their own inventions and ſuperadditions, even by an inhibition ſo plain and abſolute? They could not. There were *fathers* in the Jewiſh, as well as the Chriſtian church: good men no doubt, and who were ſuppoſed to carry authority in all their deciſions; but unhappily credulous in adopting, or ingenious in contriving new tenets, and poſſeſſed of a truly *prieſtly* zeal in laying burdens on the conſciences of men, ſometimes as an addition, ſometimes in direct oppoſition to the written law. The traditional reveries of the *elders* were held, not only of equal importance with it, but had, in many inſtances, corrupted, and, in ſome, ſuperſeded it altogether. Of this Chriſt Jeſus repeatedly complains, and charges them expreſsly with having made the word of God of none effect by their traditions.

THIS obſervation leads us to two things equally plain and concluſive in this argument:—It confirms the account that hath been given of the miſchievous tendency of traditionary pretences, in corrupting the purity both of doctrine and worſhip; and that, whatever we may ſuppoſe traditions to be in their original form, it ſeems impoſſible, in the ordinary courſe of things, to preſerve them from degenerating into fable and abſurdity, or being employed by deſigning men for their own ambitious purpoſes.—It ſhows, by itſelf, and excluſive of every other argument, the abſurdity of imagining, that the Saviour of the world, or any of thoſe immediately authoriſed by him, in the immediate view of ſuch pretentions,

tentions, and ſuch abuſe founded on tradition, whether ſuppoſed or real, ſhould have expoſed his perfect law to the ſame danger; ſhould have committed orally any doctrines, precepts, or inſtitutes of his religion to any man, or number of men, to be handled by them at diſcretion. Whoever will beſtow but half a thought in comparing the Old and New Diſpenſations, will immediately perceive, that the laſt is much more liable to abuſe than the firſt; it being far eaſier to preſerve by tradition an external mode of worſhip, conſiſting of certain rites and performances peculiar to itſelf, and which ſoon becomes familiar, is confirmed by habit, and naturally acquires a ſuperſtitious veneration; than to preſerve doctrines, and a ſpiritual worſhip, wholly intended to cultivate an inward temper of virtue and devotion.—And if infinite wiſdom, even with regard to that diſpenſation, ſaw it not fit to truſt any thing to tradition, to ſuppoſe that this ground of evidence is admiſſible in the chriſtian ſyſtem, would appear, on all the principles of analogy, utterly inconſiſtent.

SECT. VI.

OF THE SCRIPTURES AS A PERFECT RULE OF FAITH.

HAVING proved, it is preſumed, on all the principles of reaſon, experience, and analogy, that tradition is not to be admitted as a proper ſource of information, or an authentic ground of credibility: it remains, that we endeavour to prove, that the Scriptures are a perfect and compleat rule of faith, independent of every ſupplemental aid.

IT hath already been ſhown, that to ſuppoſe the ſacred penmen committed one part to writing, and another to tradition; both ſtamped with the ſame divine authority;—would be perfectly abſurd. Let us now appeal to the Sacred Record itſelf.

AT the time of our Lord's appearance, the divine law had, in a great meaſure, loſt its authority, and the people had become the mere dupes of legendary tales. The prophets, it ſeems, had early diſcovered the prelude to this abuſe—a licentious ſpirit in wandering after lying *prieſts*; and, therefore, as the only effectual cure, reminded them of the perfection of the divine law, and referred them to it, "Should not a people ſeek to their God?" True; but might they not ſeek to their God by conſulting every ſource of information;—and might there not be other means beſides the written laws? No; "To the law and the teſtimony, if they ſpeak not according to this word, it is becauſe there is no light in them." They, who? "Familiar ſpirits and wizards that peep and mutter." Now whether theſe familiar ſpirits ſpoke by falſe prophets, or elders, uttering lies in the name of the Lord, and pretending to things not authoriſed by the written record, made no difference: every truth neceſſary for them to know was contained in the law, and an appeal to every other ſtandard is precluded.

OUR Lord confirms the ſame doctrine. For a diſcovery of his true character, and the nature of his miſſion, he appeals to the Old Teſtament, which, if conſulted with candour and attention, he declares ſufficient to remove

move every prejudice the Jews entertained againſt him. "Search the Scriptures,—for they are they which teſtify of me;" again, when the rich man is repreſented as humbly ſupplicating Father Abraham to ſend a meſſenger from the other world to warn and admoniſh his brethren;—the anſwer is a remarkable and deciſive evidence in what view the antient law was to be conſidered: "If they will not hear Moſes and the Prophets, neither would they be perſuaded, ſhould one ariſe from the dead." The law of Moſes, and the Prophets explaining, and inculcating that law, was alone ſufficient for the attainment of that happineſs, and avoiding of that miſery which the rich man had in his eye, till God ſhould ſee fit to impart ſome additional diſcovery of his will.—Now, if the law given to Moſes, if the inſtructions and admonitions of the Prophets committed to writing, and preſerved by the Jewiſh Church, were thus perfect for all the purpoſes for which that diſpenſation was intended; can we reaſonably ſuppoſe, that the grace and truth which came by Jeſus Chriſt, and which comprehended the moral part of the former;—that this diſpenſation which included the laſt diſcovery of God to man, is leſs perfect as a rule of faith? Can we poſſibly allow ourſelves to think, that every thing oral was excluded from the former, and that the perfection of the latter ſhould depend on a multiplicity of unwritten traditions? Nothing could be more abſurd. From the perfection of the one, therefore, we have the ſtrongeſt preſumptive proof of the perfection of the other.

BUT independently of every preſumptive proof, we have a variety of intrinſic ones from the diſpenſation itſelf

ſelf. As every ſection in this chapter hath an immediate tendency to corroborate the point in view, I confine myſelf to one. "All ſcripture is given by the inſpiration of God, and is uſeful for doctrine, for reproof, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs, that the man of God may be perfect, furniſhed unto good works." It may, perhaps, be ſaid that by ſcripture *here* is meant the writings of the Old Teſtament: and I do not pretend to ſay they are excluded, or that by ſcripture, in the apoſtolic writings, is not generally underſtood the old diſpenſation: but that the words muſt have a particular reference to the peculiar doctrines of chriſtianity recorded in the new, which were now generally committed to writing, and in the hands of the different chriſtian ſocieties, can admit of no doubt — this being one of the laſt, if not the laſt of St. Paul's epiſtles. But whether we conſider the words as including both diſpenſations, ſo far as regards the moral and ſpiritual part, and as the firſt ſerves to prove and illuſtrate the laſt; or whether as reſpecting the chriſtian only, the argument is the ſame: It is of ſcripture the apoſtle ſpeaks, ſome thing written in which Timothy was taught, and which, excluſive of every other ſource of information, was able to make him wiſe unto ſalvation. This will appear more fully from a ſhort review and explication of the words — "Profitable for doctrine," for a diſcovery of our duty; for what is doctrine but ſomething taught that was not known before, or ſomething formerly taught enforced from new arguments and motives? ſo that by "profitable for doctrine", the apoſtle evidently means, that the great excellency of the written word is, that herein we are inſtructed in every doctrine neceſſary for us to be made acquainted with for attaining eternal

eternal happineſs—" For reproof, for correction," — for diſcovering errors either in faith or practice, removing prejudices, bringing us to a ſenſe of duty when we have erred, and in every matter of diſpute holding up a perfect and infallible rule; for awakening obſtinate and preſumptuous ſinners, and carrying home conviction with force and propriety. " For inſtruction in righteouſneſs;" what thoſe duties are which we owe to one another, wherein that holineſs conſiſts which is the foundation of true happineſs, and by what means it is to be carried forward, and perfected in the ſoul.—Theſe are the great things for which the written record is profitable, according to the Apoſtle; and, to every attentive reader of the New Teſtament, it muſt appear plain, that this is the ſummary of it; and that the great deſign of the ſacred writers is, to unfold, and enforce theſe ſeveral points at large.

IF it ſhould be objected, that, though theſe are things highly profitable — even neceſſary, it doth not from thence follow, that nothing farther is neceſſary: becauſe, what is neceſſary to a ſubject, is not, therefore, ſuppoſed to contain all the conſtituent parts of it. And ſo far it muſt be allowed, that a thing may be eſſential to a ſubject, that doth not conſtitute the whole of it—in other words, that we can ſuppoſe a written record, and tradition, neceſſary in their ſeveral degrees to perfect an evidence. But this deſtinction cannot take place here. The Apoſtle expreſly precludes it, by explaining immediately what he means by profitable.—That the Scriptures of the inſpiration of God, are profitable, not merely by compariſon with other things which are unprofitable,

profitable, or leſs profitable; but that they alone are profitable, ſo as to anſwer the ſeveral purpoſes he enumerates; and which put together, furniſh the man of God unto good works;—make him wiſe unto ſalvation, and render him perfect. Now, what furniſhes every thing neceſſary for accompliſhing an end, is perfect with regard to that end, and excludes every thing elſe. What renders the man of God perfect is a perfect rule, and requires no addition.

SECT. VII.

EXCEPTIONS AGAINST THE REASONING IN THE FOREGOING SECTIONS REMOVED.

TO invalidate the force of the reaſoning againſt tradition in the foregoing pages, three things may be urged — That natural religion, or the firſt diſcoveries of God to man, were tranſmitted through this channel to ſucceeding ages — That the purity of the Scriptures themſelves muſt have wholly depended on the fidelity of the *Church*, and if ſhe deſerve credit with regard to the Scriptures, why not with regard to tradition? If ſhe hath been accounted a faithful repoſitory in the one caſe, why not in the other? — That the Scriptures themſelves plainly refer to Apoſtolic traditions, as a rule of faith.

IT doth not appear to me, that any thing elſe having the colour of argument can be offered. Theſe therefore, we ſhall examine into, and be able, it is hoped, to ſhow, that, however ſeemingly plauſible, they have no weight in them.

Firſt,

Firſt, with regard to natural religion, let it be obſerved, that it did not conſiſt, as is here ſuppoſed, in directions and precepts delivered to our common parent — The knowledge of God, and his duty aroſe from the faculties by which his nature was diſtinguiſhed; that is, the original impreſſions ſtamped on his mind by the hand of the Creator, along with the concluſions he was fitted, by the exerciſe of his reaſon, to draw from the works of nature, his own frame, and the œconomy of Providence around him. Of any other diſcovery, at leaſt, we know nothing to the calling of Abraham, the original promiſe, and the prohibition to Noah excepted, and what may, in general be gathered from the external rite of ſacrificing; which, being deducible from no known principle in the human mind, ſeems to have drawn its origin from revelation. And ſo long as mankind were diſpoſed to pay attention to theſe ſacred impreſſions, to the dictates of ſound reaſon, and this benevolent, and wiſe order of nature, nothing further ſeems to have been neceſſary — Without, indeed, ſuppoſing reaſon and conſcience, characteriſtic faculties of our natures, every revelation would have been in vain; and to ſuppoſe theſe original and diſtinguiſhing faculties without any impreſſions of a Divinity, or any capacity of tracing the Creator in his works, any ſenſe of dependence or moral obligation ſeems perfectly abſurd. — It may be aſked for what end were they given? To form a capability of feeling the obligation of moral duties, will it be ſaid, and of reaſoning from thoſe ideas, with which his mind would be furniſhed by an after revelation? This is, at beſt, but an idle round about, and, which is more, ſuppoſes that a moral and reaſonable being was made by the

the conſtitution of his nature incapable of feeling or reaſoning. For if he was capable of either, what was more natural, what was of more importance to him, as an immediate object, than God and his duty?

ADMITTING, however, at preſent, that our ideas of God and our duty were originally derived from revelation alone, and tranſmitted by tradition. It is ſufficient to obſerve *here* — That the prodigious duration of human life previous to the flood, between which, and the creation, there were ſcarcely two generations, muſt have proved the moſt probable means of preſerving oral doctrines, ſuppoſing any ſuch to have been given during that period — That, even in this period, and notwithſtanding all the advantages of tranſmiſſion by which it was diſtinguiſhed, the knowledge of God and a ſenſe of duty, a few inſtances excepted, were almoſt extinguiſhed amidſt univerſal idolatry and impiety — That after the flood, whatever traditionary information might have been tranſmitted from Noah or his ſons, an univerſal ignorance and corruption of manners ſoon followed — "The knowledge of God, and the memory of the creation began to decay gradually, and the fables which ſucceeded the ancient tradition retained but groſs ideas of them." This gave occaſion to the calling of Abraham, in leſs than five hundred years from the deluge; in whoſe family a ſenſe of religion was preſerved, not by tradition merely, but by various and ſignal manifeſtations, and interpoſitions of Providence. The argument, therefore, from the topic of natural religion lies the other way, and concludes, not in favour of tradition, but for the neceſſity of a written law.

THE

The *ſecond* exception is, that the authenticity of the written record reſts entirely upon the ſame authority with tradition — the fidelity of thoſe who have tranſmitted both; that it is, therefore, unreaſonable to receive the one, and to reject the other. This is the ſum of an argument, artfully coloured over, and ſpeciouſly declaimed upon, — and which your traditionary men exhibit on all occaſions with an air of deciſion to their implicit votaries. But a few ſentences will ſatisfy the impartial and attentive reader that it is mere ſophiſtry. For *firſt*, this ſort of reaſoning in favour of tradition, if it proves any thing, proves too much: it ſets aſide the uſe of writing altogether, ſo that there never had been occaſion for any book to this day; becauſe every book muſt have depended on the fidelity of thoſe through whoſe hands it hath paſſed down from age to age, and every book that ſhall be written muſt depend on the fidelity of ſucceeding ages; now if thoſe who have been the inſtruments of tranſmitting a book for ſeventeen hundred years paſt, or ſhall be the inſtruments of tranſmitting one for ſeventeen hundred years to come, if the world ſhall laſt ſo long, ſhould have been, or are to be conſidered as equally fit for tranſmitting the contents of it by tradition, as the book itſelf; it may be affirmed, that there never was any occaſion at all for writing a book, if the ſubject of it were fairly made known, and never will to the end of the world. — But *ſecondly*, the fact is, that there is an immenſe difference between preſerving the contents of a written record pure, and tranſmitting traditions with any degree of credibility, could their origin be aſcertained, which is impoſſible; — a difference ſo obvious, that the very men who may be diſpoſed to propagate

the fictions of fancy, or the dreams of a diſordered mind; the ſpectres of ſuperſtition, or the deluſions of enthuſiaſm; the wonders of credulity, or the more artful inventions of *prieſtcraft*, may not have it in their power to adulterate a written record: it being extremely difficult to introduce any material alterations into a book, without a diſcovery, after it hath paſſed through many hands, and been generally read and known. And, with regard to the book in queſtion, there are peculiar circumſtances, that would have rendered any deſign of this kind morally impoſſible.—A book held ſo ſacred ſo generally ſpread, ſo frequently and publicly read, appealed to on ſo many different occaſions, oppoſed by enemies, defended by friends, tranſlated into different languages, and almoſt tranſcribed into different authors; theſe and many more circumſtances, afford all the evidence the ſubject is capable of, that no material alteration could have been introduced into the ſacred record: an evidence infinitely ſuperior to any thing that can poſſibly be alledged in favour of tradition, where there is no public, original, authenticated ſtandard to which, in caſe of doubt or oppoſition, we can have recourſe.

WILL it be aſked, by way of objection,—do the epiſtles then, contain all that the inſpired writers taught? Are all the tranſactions of the firſt miniſters of religion, ſo numerous, and who laboured ſo abundantly, confined to the narrow limits of a little volume? No indeed; no more than all that our Lord ſaid and did is narrated by the four Evangeliſts. The latter informs us of every thing neceſſary for us to know during his abode on earth; and the former, of every thing left in

in commiſſion to his Apoſtles, now that he is gone to heaven, till he come again.—The Apoſtolic manner of inſtruction and addreſs, and the ſeveral topics inſiſted upon, would, no doubt, be different according to the temper, prejudices, degrees of knowledge, and peculiar circumſtances of the churches; a ſample of which almoſt every epiſtle furniſhes: but they had but *one* goſpel to preach, in its leading and capital doctrines the ſame to all. From this variety, great indulgencies, in particular caſes, to the prepoſſeſſions of its new converts might be neceſſary; hence different practices, and different external forms, would prevail; not owing to any poſitive law, or, even, to the genius of Chriſtianity, but merely to that prudence and wiſdom which are always diſpoſed to yield in leſſer, and in themſelves indifferent things, to obtain greater: of this prudence the Apoſtle Paul was himſelf a ſtriking example; and he ſeems to have eſtabliſhed it as a rule among the churches. — But becauſe Paul purified himſelf according to the law, took a vow and ſhaved his head, that he might not give offence to the zealous Jews, will it therefore follow, that this ought to be a ſtanding ordinance in the church of Chriſt? Or, becauſe certain Chriſtian Societies might have been indulged by the Apoſtles, or firſt miniſters of religion in ſimilar practices in condeſcenſion to certain prejudices, which it would have been imprudent to oppoſe; is their example to be eſtabliſhed into a model carrying the authority of law in it? Nothing could be more abſurd.

BUT are not traditions referred to by the apoſtle Paul himſelf? "Therefore brethren, ſtand faſt, and hold

the traditions which ye have been taught whether by word or epiſtle." That the Apoſtle ſpeaks here of traditions is not diſputed, but what theſe traditions were becomes the queſtion — whether traditions excluſive of the written word, and intended as a ſupplement to it bearing the force of a law to all the churches of Chriſt to the end of the world? — Whether peculiar to the particular ſituation of thoſe to whom he writes? — Or, whether certain points that had been preached to the churches, but not yet committed to writing? The laſt evidently appears to have been the caſe. The canon of Scripture was not only not compleated at this time, but this was among the firſt epiſtles written to the churches; and, therefore, the Apoſtle may well be ſuppoſed to refer to ſeveral things not particularly mentioned in his epiſtles to the Theſſalonians; what had been delivered orally to them, or to the other churches, but afterwards committed to writing, would juſtly be conſidered as traditions, till the whole epiſtles were collected, and every particular Chriſtian Society had opportunity to examine and compare the whole ſacred code: for it will not be ſaid, that every particular epiſtle contains the whole doctrines and precepts of Chriſtianity. — Or, we may ſuppoſe, with great propriety, that particular directions were orally delivered by the Apoſtles, relative to the extraordinary circumſtances of the churches at that time, which it was, by no means, neceſſary to commit to writing, as being of little conſequence to the ordinary, and ſettled ſtate of Chriſtianity: — What could not take place in any other ſituation, or, but in one ſimilar, could not be deſigned as a permanent and unalterable directory. — Something analagous to this, is always the caſe

caſe in every infant ſociety. In one or other of theſe views, the words admit of a plain and ſenſible interpretation, without ſuppoſing that the Apoſtle intended to eſtabliſh a ſyſtem of traditions as an additional rule of faith: traditions of which we know nothing, and which, therefore, under this general denomination, might be rendered ſubſervient, at pleaſure, to the purpoſes of thoſe who had preſumption enough to impoſe them upon the weak and credulous.—It were juſt as much to the purpoſe to tell us what the parchments contained which the ſame Apoſtle left at Troas. From this ſacred roll, for ought I know, a new goſpel might have been made out. The authority of the *Church* was equally good for both, ſeeing we are equally ignorant of either: for it only required boldneſs enough to maintain, that they were found at ſuch a time, and in ſuch a place, and contained ſuch doctrines and inſtitutions, as one was pleaſed to authenticate; and the whole matter was at an end. For, if once we are brought to reſolve our faith into an implicit aſſent to any tribunal upon earth, ſenſe or nonſenſe, truth or falſehood, poſſibility or impoſſibility, are admitted with equal eaſe.

CHAP. III.

OF THE RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE AND PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

SECT I.

OF THE REASONS OF THIS INQUIRY.

THE ground we have gained in the preceding pages, in expoſing the weakneſs and abſurdity of all traditionary pretences, and eſtabliſhing the Scriptures as a perfect rule of faith, is of no importance at all, if it ſtill remain a queſtion — Whether individuals have a right of inquiry, and judging for themſelves; or whether any man, or number of men upon earth, the *Church*, a general council, or the ſupreme Pontiff dictating from his chair, are veſted with the excluſive privilege of interpreting the ſacred record, and determining finally in all religious controverſies; it preciſely amounting to the ſame thing in this caſe, whether you hold or reject traditions, how many, or of what kind theſe traditions are. If I am not at liberty to uſe my own underſtanding, he, or they who have aſſumed the leading of it, and to whom I believe in conſcience, I am bound to ſubmit, may make Scripture tradition, or tradition Scripture.

IT will be of importance, therefore, if we can throw ſome light upon this queſtion: a queſtion however intereſting

tereſting to proteſtants, as the bulwark of thoſe civil and religious rights which they profeſs to hold moſt ſacred, and, however fully explained, and warmly defended in oppoſition to the claim of the church of Rome, which, nevertheleſs, they ſeem wholly to forget in their reaſonings, and conduct to one another: ſo that while they acknowledge, in words, that the Scriptures are the rule of faith, and alone ſufficient to make men wiſe unto Salvation, and every party is well diſpoſed to judge for themſelves; they appear extremely jealous of granting the ſame liberty to one another; and, inſtead of the Scriptures, would ſlip in their own explications and comments, bind their deciſions upon others an infallible ſtandard, and oblige them to ſee with *their* eyes.—And what is this but popery under another name? It is the worſt, and moſt pernicious part of it. For of what importance is it to ſociety, whether I believe in tranſubſtantiation or not, whether I fall down before an image, or pray to a Saint or not. If I err, I err alone: but he who claims a right over my underſtanding, and pretends to eſtabliſh a creed to which I muſt declare my aſſent under certain pains and penalties, injurious to my rights as a good member of the commmonwealth, attacks the common privileges of ſociety. From the ſame principles he would be led to enſlave mankind altogether; however at preſent he may intend no ſuch thing, however he may diſſemble his purpoſes, or, however he may not have in his power a proper opportunity of executing them.

IT is intended, however, in treating of this ſubject, to take a more extenſive view of it, and to inquire how far the rights of conſcience, and private judgment, are

affected, *firſt*, by the laws of political government — and, *ſecondly*, by the laws of chriſtianity; that is, as members of civil and chriſtian ſociety.

SECT. II.

OF THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY UPON THE RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE AND PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

IN attending to man as a ſocial being, or a member of civil ſociety, we muſt not overlook the higher relation he ſtands in as a moral agent; becauſe this is characteriſtic of his nature. It is the primary law by which the great Creator intended to direct our conduct, and is the fouudation of every other duty; and from which, therefore, we cannot poſſibly be abſolved by any human authority. It is in its own nature unalienable and incapable of being transferred. It is univerſal, immutable, eternal. Now it is conſcience that feels the force of this law, and the obligations we lie under to comply with it — or in other words conſcience, which properly conſtitutes a moral and accountable agent, is the diſtinguiſhing law of our natures. As beings, therefore, immediately under this law, every individual is obliged to conform himſelf to his own ideas of right and wrong; that is to thoſe intimations of duty and thoſe obligations which ariſe from his ſtate of dependence, the bleſſings he enjoys, and the future hopes he entertains. — Indeed nothing could be more abſurd than to ſuppoſe, that the all-wiſe, all-gracious Author of our beings ſhould have conſtituted our natures ſo, as to make our happineſs, or our miſery to reſult from the approbation, or diſapprobation of our own minds, aud yet

yet that it ſhould become our duty, not to judge for ourſelves where conſcience alone was concerned. This would be to counteract the very deſign of underſtanding and conſcience, and to ſuperſede, at once, the great law of our creation.

HENCE it appears, that the relation in which we ſtand to ſociety cannot poſſibly encroach upon thoſe rights that belong to us as moral beings; becauſe a prior or ſuperior obligation cannot poſſibly be weakened, much leſs ſet aſide, by that which is evidently ſubſequent and inferior — Aud yet, it cannot be denied that *this* relation doth oblige us to certain conceſſions, and to ſubmit to certain laws and conditions founded merely on human authority, to which antecedently, and conſidered as individuals, we were not bound.

As it is of importance to mark with ſome preciſion, how far theſe obligations extend, I beg leave juſt to mention thoſe caſes, where, from the nature, and by the fundamental laws of all civilized ſocieties, individuals can transfer their rights to others, and are bound to conform themſelves to meaſures eſtabliſhed by lawful authority, and not to their own ideas of right and wrong.

AND, in general, the great end of all civil ſociety being to procure, and maintain ſuch temporal articles and outward advantages, as in a ſeparate and ſingle ſtate would be impoſſible; it is obvious that for this end certain general laws are neceſſary. Now, as laws cannot be made, all at once, ſo as to be adapted to every poſſible caſe; as they muſt receive additions, improvements, and alterations according to the growth, and different

different circumſtances of ſociety; ſome perſon, or perſons, muſt be entruſted with this power, as the various exigences of the ſtate may require; that is — there muſt be a LEGISLATIVE power. But as laws are of no avail, but as they are properly enforced and rendered effectual, the right of executing the laws, and judging finally in all queſtions where individuals cannot agree, muſt be lodged in hands different from the legiſlative; that is there muſt be an EXECUTIVE power. Both theſe powers muſt neceſſarily take place in every well regulated ſociety; becauſe they are equally neceſſary for the common ſecurity. This being obſerved it follows;

Firſt, that government ought to be conſidered as a part of the divine conſtitution for promoting the happineſs of mankind—That as the all-wiſe Creator hath formed us with natures that lead us to ſociety, and with wants that cannot be ſupplied but in a ſocial ſtate, whatever regulations, laws, ordinances, offices, are neceſſary, and moſt ſubſervient for promoting this end, are approved of, and authoriſed by him; and conſequently that obedience to the higher powers, and fulfilling the engagements, that either formally, or virtually ariſe from the different ſtations we hold, is a moral duty — where ſuch obedience, and ſuch engagements do not obviouſly contradict that higher allegiance, which we antecedently owe to the great Lord of the world, which no ſubſequent relation can poſſibly vacate or diſſolve.

Secondly, that whatever advantages we enjoy as members of any particular ſociety, may be defined and limited by that ſociety, or thoſe to whom the powers of *legiſlation*

legiſlation are committed; and the minority are not only bound to ſubmit, but to co-operate with the general laws: or, if individuals will refuſe to acquieſce, much more if they will reſiſt and oppoſe, they are to be conſidered as enemies to, and counteracting the fundamental laws of ſociety.—If I purchaſe an eſtate or landed property for a juſt equivalent, it becomes my own perſonal right, and he who would attempt to ſeize any part of it by fraud or violence, would be guilty of a manifeſt injury, and be amenable to the laws of the ſociety of which I am a member; but though this eſtate is my own perſonal property, it is a property thus rendered ſecure by the *ſame* laws; as this ſecurity, therefore, is of real value, and as a public aſſeſſment or tax may be neceſſary for the ſupport and preſervation of the common intereſt, I am undoubtedly bound to contribute the rate or proportion of ſuch tax or aſſeſſment as ſhall be laid upon it by truſtees appointed by the public for that end—Acting on the ſame principles, ſhould a diſpute happen concerning property, or any emolument I had laid claim to as a member of the ſociety, I am bound to ſubmit to the deciſion of judges eſtabliſhed by the general laws, and veſted with the ſole juriſdiction of deciding finally in queſtions of this nature: I may think myſelf injured, perhaps I am ſo, but the object of diſpute being plainly cognizable by the public, and determined in the laſt reſort, agreeably to the common forms, it becomes my duty quietly to ſubmit, and hold the deciſion a legal and valid one, for the ſame reaſons that I ſhould approve of, or judge any reference neceſſary at all: for all ſuch caſes ought to be conſidered as of the nature of a reference or

ſubmiſſion

ſubmiſſion for terminating differences about which individuals would never agree.

Thirdly, with regard to meaſures planned and carried forward for the public weal, it ought further to be admitted, that individuals are not at liberty to act on the principles of private judgment, or to regulate their conduct by their own ideas of fitneſs and unfitneſs; becauſe, in this caſe, it is ſelf-evident, that univerſal anarchy would enſue, and all government be at an end; which would neceſſarily iſſue in one of two things: — That fraud and violence would prevail, till the ſtronger party ſhould enſlave the weaker: — Or, that reverting by joint conſent to the ſecurity of common laws, individuals would be brought to ſee the neceſſity of acting, not according to their own ideas, but the deciſions of the public; ſo that, in the nature of things, common laws, and meaſures enacted by legal authority, are ſuppoſed to preclude the right of private judgment.

Fourthly, that in every well conſtituted ſociety there muſt be certain ſtations, where inferiors are obliged to execute the ſentences of ſuperiors in contradiction to their own opinions; becauſe without ſuch implicit obedience, the ſeveral departments of government would not be carried forward, nor the laws rendered effectual. Nothing could be more abſurd, than a ſcheme of government, where the loweſt officer in the ſtate was left to judge for himſelf, and to plead his own convictions in oppoſition to the indiſpenſable duties of his ſtation. His conduct, in this caſe, hath no concern with the rule of his private judgment; implicit obedience is the ſuppoſed,

poſed, and neceſſary condition on which he holds his office, and, while he continues in it, his obligation is abſolute.—In all theſe caſes private judgment is bound to ſubmit to the public:—and, in general, while things remain in a doubtful ſtate, and meaſures appear in one light to one, and in another light to another, and theſe meaſures merely regard the political advantages we hold as members of civil ſociety, the ſubject is not abſolved from obedience, and inconſiſtently offers the plea of conſcience. Or, if he ſhould call in religion in ſupport of his oppoſition, or diſobedience, he may, perhaps, act conſiſtently with regard to his own ideas of right and wrong, but he evidently betrays his want of underſtanding; and the execution of the laws neither can, nor ought to pay any regard to his ſcruples. The public order and ſafety is the grand object in the eye of the law, which cannot poſſibly admit of condeſcenſions to individuals, which would neceſſarily imply a toleration utterly inconſiſtent with the foundations of government. But if, ceaſing to be doubtful, public meaſures ſhould appear to the majority, manifeſtly inconſiſtent with the eſſential laws of the conſtitution, and a direct violation of the common rights of ſociety; the grand deſign of government being hereby overturned, the ſociety is thrown upon its original ground, and called upon to act for its own ſafety.

SECT.

SECT. III.

OF THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE AND PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

HAVING drawn a few outlines ſufficient to mark the authority and extent of civil prerogative, and how far ſubmiſſion is due conſiſtently with the rights of conſcience and private judgment, upon the principles of natural religion; it is now proper to inquire, if, by the laws of Chriſtianity, theſe diſtinguiſhing faculties of our nature are laid under any further reſtraints.

AND, in order to illuſtrate this queſtion, it may be in the general obſerved, that no revelation from God can poſſibly contradict thoſe original feelings that are characteriſtic of our natures; becauſe this would deſtroy every teſt by which we could poſſibly judge of truth or falſehood, virtue or vice: for what teſt or rule of action could be eſtabliſhed more authentic, or more ſacred? Or, if it could, by what evidence are you to judge of it? There muſt be ſome ſtandard within yourſelf, call it by what name you pleaſe, to which, upon the whole, you muſt have recourſe, and by which you are enabled to judge of ultimate, or mediate, fitneſs and propriety. Without this you are incapable of directing your own conduct, or receiving direction from any other quarter. However, therefore, it may be true, that the mind of man, without any further diſcovery from God, is unable to furniſh a compleat rule of duty, or to lead us to the whole

whole extent of that happineſs of which our natures are capable; it may be affirmed, without exalting the human powers above what they really are, that they are ſtill poſſeſſed of a capacity of judging, by an appeal to our own minds, whether a revelation pretended to be from God be worthy of him, and carry marks of credebility in it, with regard both to its internal and external evidence.—One may be ſufficiently conſcious of his own ignorance, and ſee the neceſſity of ſome additional diſcovery, and yet be able with ſome certainty, from the ideas of moral fitneſs and probability, of which he is ſtill poſſeſſed, to ſay whether he be greatly miſled or not, if ſuch a diſcovery ſhall be made to him.—In the ſame manner that a traveller, who may be incapable of directing his own way without a guide, may yet remember ſo many ſtanding conſpicuous marks, as to pronounce, with ſome aſſurance, that his guide doth not impoſe upon him. Now, as underſtanding and conſcience, ſo far as theſe do not exceed their proper limits, by preſuming to encroach upon the fundamental laws of ſociety, are undoubtedly the rule of our conduct, as rational and moral beings; (ſee p. 92, 93 of this ſection) it appears that a revelation from God cannot deſtroy the privileges included in theſe leading faculties of our natures; and conſequently that all the arguments which tyrants and *prieſts* would deduce from the Scriptures, to ſubject theſe higher powers in matters wholly moral, to human authority, can ſerve only, in proportion as they appear concluſive, to beget ſuſpicions againſt Chriſtianity as unfriendly to human nature; and, inſtead of proving a valuable acquiſition to our knowledge and improvement—to render our ſtate infinitely more wretched.

THIS

THIS reaſoning, it may be thought by ſome, is intended to furniſh a pretence for rejecting any evidence, that may be ſuppoſed to be derived from this quarter, againſt the claim which we would here explain and vindicate. Far otherwiſe—we are certain no ſuch evidence can be produced; nor are we afraid of any attempt this way—on the contrary, we ſhall make it appear that, while the New Teſtament confirms the account we have given of thoſe obligations we owe as members of *civil* ſociety, it leaves the rights of conſcience and private judgment entire, as members of chriſtian ſociety—The former reaſoning, therefore, hath been chiefly introduced to ſhow, that chriſtianity ſupports and fortifies this claim, and thereby receives additional luſtre, and confirmation of its divinity.

FOR, in the *firſt* place, it conſiders the king as ſupreme, and governors, in general, as the *ordinance of man*; and yet the powers that be as *ordained of God:* that is, government, as reſpecting its external form, depending on variable cauſes—times, circumſtances, and the genius of a people; but under ſome form or other, neceſſary for the order and happineſs of ſociety and, therefore, divine or immediately authoriſed of God, and binding on the ſubject in point of conſcience, ſo far as regards the publick utility and welfare—but not extending further, or ſubjecting the conſcience, in general, to the deciſions of any human tribunal; "Be ſubject not only for wrath, but alſo for conſcience ſake; for this cauſe ye pay tribute alſo." Where, it is evident, that, with regard to ſuch things only as are included in the idea of civil government, the Apoſtle extends the obligations

obligations of conſcience. The command of the civil magiſtrate is of no force when it exceeds theſe bounds; "Did not we ſtrictly command you that ye ſhould not "preach in this name? And Peter and the other Apoſtles anſwered and ſaid, we ought to obey God rather than man."

BUT the ſenſe of the ſacred writers, on this part of our ſubject, may be collected into one point of view, from a ſingle paſſage — the deciſion of our Lord himſelf in this very caſe: "Render unto Cæſar the things that are Cæſar's, and unto God the things that are God's." To underſtand which it may not be improper to obſerve, that Judea had lately become a Roman province; and though, in general, permitted to be governed by its own laws, and to enjoy the exerciſe of the national religion, confeſſed its allegiance by ſubmitting to the appointment of a Roman gove. .or, or nominal king, the payment of public tribute, and an appeal, in the laſt reſort, to Cæſar. The Jews, diſſatisfied with their new maſter, as might be naturally looked for, bore the yoke with extreme impatience. They, therefore, propoſe a queſtion, probably deviſed to inſinuate their diſſatisfaction with the authority which the Roman empire had aſſumed, certainly to enſnare Jeſus, and to expoſe him to the reſentment of the civil powers by the anſwer which they expected from him.—Mark with what addreſs they introduce themſelves, "Maſter we know that thou art true, and teacheſt the way of God in truth, neither careſt thou for any man, tell us, therefore, is it lawful to give tribute to Cæſar or not?" What a fine compliment this, and how artfully formed to throw one

off his guard. They would ſeem to acknowledge his claim to a divine character, and ſuch an unlimited confidence in his authority, as to be finally determined by his deciſion of the queſtion; but well knowing their inſidious intentions, with admirable juſtneſs and propriety, he returned the following anſwer: "But Jeſus perceived their wickedneſs, and ſaid, why tempt ye me ye hypocrites, ſhow me the tribute money;—whoſe is this image and ſuperſcription? And they ſaid, Cæſar's: then ſaith he unto them, render unto Cæſar the things that are Cæſar's, and unto God the things that are God's." This money is a plain proof of the authority of the Roman empire: it bears the image of Cæſar as your ſovereign, and your admitting it as the lawful and current coin of this country, is an implicit acknowledgment of his authority in civil and temporal articles: neither can ye plead conſcience, with any conſiſtence, in refuſing to pay it: political conſtitutions are daily expoſed to changes, and are obliged to ſubmit to great innovations: this is the order of Providence, which pulls down one ſtate and raiſes up another, ſeemingly at pleaſure, but, in truth, for wiſe and important reaſons, of which we can ſometimes, but more frequently cannot poſſibly judge. It is the wiſe order of Providence, in particular, with regard to you, as now a dependent nation and people;—and as to the paying tribute, it is in itſelf an indifferent thing, and may be lawfully paid under one form of government as well as another.—While the civil powers, therefore, do not tranſgreſs their proper limits, and aſſume a right of violating the ſacred obligations of conſcience, never pretend to call in queſtion thoſe duties that ariſe from the dependence of

of a ſubject, and the circumſtances in which he is unavoidably placed.—But, if *theſe* ſhould at any time be invaded, remember you muſt render to God the things that are God's; ſeeing no human tribunal has a right to determine for another, where the queſtion is, what am I to believe concerning God, or what is that worſhip which he requires, and is alone acceptable to him? Every thing in this queſtion is an appeal to man, as a rational and moral being, and he is accountable to God only.—If this comment appear juſt, the reader, it is hoped, will excuſe the length of it, as it contains an explicit declaration, from the higheſt authority, concerning the rights of conſcience, and the duty we owe as ſubjects to civil government.

LET us now enquire, in the *ſecond* place, whether the ſacred writings leave the rights of conſcience and private judgment entire, as members of *Chriſtian* ſociety?—Whether they conſtitute any ſpiritual guide, or any particular order of men, with paramount and excluſive powers of direction over the conſcience, and deciſion in matters of faith?—Or whether they appeal to the collective body of Chriſtians, in general, and every individual, in particular, as having a right, from the nature of their character as men, and the religion propoſed to them;—founded upon proper evidence, and implying a perſonal intereſt;—to think, to enquire, to judge for themſelves.

WHEN the Saviour of the world appeared in the exerciſe of his public character, the ſimple queſtion was—"Art thou he that ſhould come, or do we look for another?"

ther?" Now there was no way of determining this queſtion with any certainty, but by an appeal to the Scriptures of the old Teſtament concerning him, or by ſome evidence he was to exhibit of himſelf, or both — With regard to the *firſt*, as by the Scriptures his real character was to be determined, to the Scriptures he directs the inquiry of his hearers, and calls upon every individual to ſearch and judge for himſelf, even in oppoſition to *Church* authority, which was exerciſed, at that time, as it hath been in every age where it hath aſſumed a dominion over the conſcience, without regard to truth or humanity — "They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's ſhoulders, but they themſelves will not move them with one of their fingers." He, therefore, warns the people on all occaſions againſt the impoſition of theſe arrogant guides, however clothed with the moſt venerable names of Rabbis, Doctors, Elders,—of the ſynagogue, or ſanhedrim, "Call no man maſter upon earth;" and he never fails to lead them back to the law, and to direct them to an impartial inquiry *there*, when through falſe gloſſes, and artificial interpretations put upon it, he perceived their underſtanding had been miſled, and their ſenſe of divine things groſsly corrupted.

WITH regard to the *ſecond*, the evidence our Lord exhibited of his divine character — the miracles which he wrought, the doctrines which he taught, and, in general the conformity of his whole appearance to his publick miſſion — all theſe were expoſed to publick view and examination. His miracles were wrought openly, and a fair opportunity afforded of publick and private inquiry

quiry — "theſe things were not done in a corner." His doctrines were delivered to the multitude, and were unfolded gradually as they were able to bear, or to underſtand them. As he aſſumed the character of a teacher come from God, ſo he improved every opportunity of divine inſtruction, removing prejudices, and furniſhing every means of conviction. — Hence he tells them, "If I had not come and ſpoken unto you ye had been without ſin, but now ye have no cloak for your ſin." He no where attempts to ſubſtitute authority, not even the higheſt, in the place of evidence; but reaſons with his hearers as moral and intelligent beings, who, therefore, had a juſt claim to demand ſatisfaction with regard to the grounds of their faith. He doth not, even overlook the objections of his moſt unreaſonable oppoſers, and moſt inveterate enemies, but anſwers them on their own principles, with a clearneſs and energy, that nothing but the moſt invincible prejudices could poſſibly reſiſt.—In one word, on the evidence which he exhibited, ſo as to render all inexcuſable, he reſts the whole deciſion of his public character, "If any man hear my words and believe not, I judge him not; he hath one that judgeth him, the word that I have ſpoken, the ſame ſhall judge him in the laſt day."

THE Apoſtles who were immediately commiſſioned by their Divine Maſter, follow the ſame plan. They had received no authoritative power over the conſciences of men. They were commanded ſimply to teach; and for this end were inſtructed in all the laws of his ſpiritual kingdom, and all the doctrines of the new diſpenſation they were called to eſtabliſh — Agreeably to this

commiſſion they explain, in different points of view, and enforce the diſtinguiſhing tenets of Chriſtianity from the moſt convincing arguments, directing thoſe to whom they addreſs themſelves to perſonal inquiry, ſo as to be able to give a reaſon of the hope that was in them; and on all occaſions, while they alarm the conſcience, they convince the judgment. There were early pretenders to Apoſtolic powers. What courſe were chriſtians to take? were they to compare the *ſpirits* together, and to judge from *their* characters and doctrine? were they to judge from what their underſtandings might ſuggeſt, aſſiſted by any more perfect rule of which they might be in poſſeſſion? or were they to appeal to *church* authority? There was no ſuch ſtandard as *church* authority in thoſe days. They were to judge for themſelves by the beſt means with which Providence had furniſhed them. "Believe not every ſpirit but try the ſpirits whether they are of God, for many falſe ſpirits are gone out into the world," a caution and direction that muſt have been interpreted as the cruelſt of all inſults, if they had no right to inquire and judge for themſelves—But that a ſpirit of honeſt inquiry was accounted not only a laudable temper of mind, but neceſſary to lay a ſolid and rational foundation for the faith of chriſtians to reſt upon, appears with the moſt convincing evidence from the high eulogy which the ſacred hiſtorian makes on the Bereans. "Theſe were more noble than thoſe in Theſſalonica, in that they received the word with all readineſs of mind, and ſearched the Scriptures daily, whether theſe things were ſo or not." They received nothing upon report, or mere authority—even Apoſtolical, but ſearched the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament, comparing

paring them with the doctrines of the New, and found that they ſupported and mutually illuſtrated one another. Noble Bereans indeed! but how unhappy would your fate have been, had your lot fallen in days of church authority; ye would have been denounced heretics, and piouſly conſigned to the flames.

IF ever any man had a claim to authority in the churches, the Apoſtle Paul was he: his call was extraordinary, the means of his inſtruction were extraordinary, his learning and addreſs were extraordinary, and his influence among the churches was very great. But doth he at any time employ *this* authority, or the influence he had ſo juſtly acquired to check a ſpirit of inquiry, or to overawe the conſcience? His views were very different, "Moreover I call God for a record upon my ſoul, that to ſpare you I came not as yet to Corinth." He had uſed all the plainneſs, and all the prudent ſeverity that became a wiſe inſtructor, a tender ſpiritual father. He had reproved their errors, and admoniſhed them for their faults, he had ſet their danger before them, and given them his beſt advice—in which he aimed at no authority, but what aroſe from their conviction of the truth, and their ſenſe of having been in the wrong. He durſt go no further. "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy." And he gives an excellent reaſon for his not attempting ſo injurious an uſurpation—a reaſon that ought to have precluded every future attempt of this kind; "For by faith ye ſtand."—Your faith is your ſecurity amidſt all the dangers to which ye muſt be expoſed on account of your profeſſion, and amidſt all temptations ariſing from

ſenſible objects, by which ye are in hazard of being ſeduced; it ought not, therefore, to be blind faith: your convictions, the grounds on which your hopes are formed ought to be rational, and the effect of the moſt impartial and ſatisfying inquiry: ye ought to be fully perſuaded in your own minds independently of any perſonal authority of mine. It were endleſs to quote paſſages in ſupport of the rights of conſcience and private judgment; they are innumerable; and we may defy all the ſons of Levi to produce one ſingle text, from whence it ſhall appear that the inſpired penmen have eſtabliſhed a ſelect junto to judge authoritatively of their writings, have directed any part of them to an order of *Eccleſiaſtics* to be explained only by them—or finally, that they have eſtabliſhed any human juriſdiction to which we are ſubjected, and by which our opinions and actions are cogzible as moral and accountable beings—The Scriptures are evidently directed to the whole body of chriſtians, or to different chriſtian ſocieties as repreſentative of them. By theſe ſocieties they were read and ſtudied, no man pretending to dominion over another; not even thoſe immediately commiſſioned by the Apoſtles. They would not claim what their conſtituents had formally diſclaimed. Their work was to feed the flock of God, and to be examples to it, to admoniſh them in the ſpirit of love and meekneſs, and not to lord it over God's heritage: they deſired no more—Holding the truth in unrighteouſneſs or an obſtinate oppoſition to the dictates of conſcience, by which the offender ſtood evidently ſelf condemned, conſtituted, in thoſe days of Apoſtolic ſimplicity, the idea of an *heretic*, and was the capital ground of public cenſure.

BUT

BUT why do we appeal to any particular diſpenſation? The great Lord of the univerſe, in the general order of Providence, doth not deal with his rational creatures by mere authority, but agreeably to their moral and intelligent natures—If, in particular inſtances, he hath concealed the immediate end he had in view, or the propriety of the means for accompliſhing it; if he hath done this to teach men ſubmiſſion, and to preſerve upon their minds a ſenſe of their own imperfection, and entire dependence upon him, it is becauſe, on the whole, he hath given them the fulleſt evidence and ſtrongeſt conviction that his ways are juſt and equal. "Judge, I pray you, betwext me my and vineyard, what more would have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" Thus he condeſcends to appeal to the reaſon and the conſciences of men, and permits his ways to be tried at that bar, in thoſe inſtances where his moral adminiſtration is properly the object of thoſe powers—And can we ſuppoſe, that he hath entruſted any created being with an authority, which his own perfections, and the faculties by which he hath diſtinguiſhed the nature of man, will not permit him to exerciſe? It cannot be ſuppoſed without the higheſt impiety and abſurdity.

SECT. IV.

OF THE CAPACITY OF THE GREATER PART OF JUDGING FOR THEMSELVES.

WHAT hath been offered in ſupport of the rights of private judgment, may, perhaps, appear to ſome

ſome as mere ſpeculation—an idle philoſophical reverie in direct oppoſition to fact and experience. And, by ſuch, it will, no doubt, be urged, that a religion deriving its chief credit from authority, in whatever contempt it may be held in theory, hath been, and will continue to be the religion of the multitude in every age and country; that the greater part are not formed nor placed in circumſtances for examination; eſpecially where tedious reſearches, deep diſquiſitions, and critical inquiry are neceſſary to aſcertain the preciſe idea and meaning of the author, and where men of learning and great abilities differ among themſelves; that this holds true, in particular with regard to the Scriptures, eſpecially Paul's epiſtles, where the ſenſe is often obſcure, and the reaſoning broken by long digreſſions; that, in ſuch circumſtances, we cannot ſuppoſe that the bulk of mankind are capable of perſonal inquiry, and judging for themſelves.

THIS it muſt be acknowledged, is plauſibly enough urged, becauſe it ſeems to reſt upon, and to derive its chief force from the general circumſtances of mankind; but a little attention will ſatisfy every man of common underſtanding, that there is no real weight in in it—For

Firſt, the ignorance of the bulk of mankind is not owing to incapacity, or the diſadvantageous circumſtances in which they are placed; but, more generally, to a moſt criminal inattention to every moral and religious concern.—Men are early taught, and ſoon learn from experience, that every occupation, art, or ſcience, requires time, labour, and attention to arrive at any perfection in it; and, therefore, never think of becoming artiſts,

artiſts, or ſcholars, without proper application: but, with regard to religion, they ſee almoſt every one diſpoſed to truſt to accident, or to ſome ſpiritual guide, whom they have been accuſtomed to conſider as led by their trade to make the proper inquiry; and as they have not obſerved any ſenſible inconvenience ariſing from this manner of adopting a creed, they can perceive no neceſſity of leaving the beaten tract, or giving themſelves any further trouble about the matter. They are well ſatisfied with the religion of their fathers, or the ſect whoſe tenets they have been taught from their infancy to hold ſacred: and thus a particular mode of religion becomes a family diſtinction, and is faithfully tranſmitted from father to ſon without examination, or knowing any thing further on the ſubject than certain names and forms that mark different contending parties. Hence, whatever talents or abilities men are poſſeſſed of in other reſpects, few ever think of becoming wiſer, or receiving any improvement in their religious knowledge. The defect ariſes not, therefore, from want of underſtanding, but from inattention — For it will be found, I apprehend, that the underſtandings of men are more on a level, than is commonly imagined, where they have the ſame motives to conſideration and inquiry; and however learning may ſerve to lay open new ſources of knowledge, it will never make that underſtanding diſtinct and vigorous, which was before incorrect and feeble. It may enlarge the ſphere of our ideas, and give the mind a wider compaſs to range in; but that power which adopts or rejects firſt principles, which perceives the agreement or diſagreement between ideas, which connects or ſeparates them, and leads us to certain concluſions, muſt have

have been antecedently the gift of nature, and cannot fail to diſcover itſelf, when a ſubject is fairly propoſed, and rendered in any meaſure intereſting to us.—Let us ſuppoſe, for inſtance, that every individual were as much convinced, that it was neceſſary for him to underſtand the New Teſtament, as to be acquainted with a deed, conveying to him a fortune, or legacy of great value, but left him on this ſole condition, that he ſhould be able to read and explain the capital articles contained in it; and what would be the conſequence? It might be pronounced with aſſurance, that there are few, in ſuch a caſe, that would not be able to give a tolerable account of it. For,

Secondly, it is by no means true, that the New Teſtament is ſo unintelligible, even to ordinary underſtandings, as is pretended.—Nothing could be more injurious to the moral perfections of God, than to ſuppoſe, that he ſhould have given a rule of duty not to be underſtood by thoſe for whom it was intended. It would be to ſuppoſe the Deity acting below the ſtandard of common ſenſe and common humanity. It ought, therefore, to be maintained, and it is certainly fact, that the Scriptures, with regard to the great and leading doctrines and precepts contained in them, are plain, and may be underſtood by every individual of common capacity, who is truly diſpoſed to pay due attention to them.—Many things, indeed, may appear dark and intricate; they do ſo to men of the greateſt capacity and learning. What then? Doth not the natural world abound with difficulties which no human underſtanding can reſolve? But will it follow from thence, that the works of the great

great Creator were not intended to diſplay, and do not actually diſplay his glory; that, notwithſtanding theſe difficulties, which puzzle the human underſtanding, they do not exhibit the cleareſt, and moſt convincing proof of ſupreme intelligence, wiſdom, and goodneſs? The Scriptures, therefore, in perfect analogy to the general order of Providence, may contain many things hard to be underſtood, and which they that are unſtable and unlearned wreſt to their own deſtruction, and yet may exhibit a ſyſtem of doctrines, as a rule of faith, and of duties and precepts, as a rule of life and conduct, adapted to the capacities of all.—Obſervation and experience have been daily contributing their aids in throwing new light on ſome of the moſt obſcure paſſages; and, no doubt, ſtill additional light will be thrown on parts yet hid from us, as it ſhall be ſubſervient to the great deſigns of divine wiſdom, in gradually unfolding his moral plan; when things that no human underſtanding could have diſcovered, will appear ſufficiently plain.—In the mean time, no man is accountable further than his underſtanding can penetrate, and and he has the opportunities of enquiry; if he hath not wilfully neglected the means of improvement, and arriving at the knowledge of the truth. If he uſes the advantages he enjoys, if he ſearches with candour, if he acts with honeſty, he has nothing to fear. He has much to hope. He has reaſon to believe, that he ſhall not fall into any dangerous miſtake. "If any man do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or not." That honeſty of heart, and uprightneſs of temper, which leads to a conſcientious performance of duty, ſo far as it is known, is the beſt preſervative againſt

againſt error, into which men are more frequently led by a bad diſpoſition and irregular paſſions, than the weakneſs of their underſtandings.

IT may be thought that the difficulty of aſcertaining whether the originals are faithfully tranſmitted and tranſlated, muſt ſtill remain an invincible draw-back againſt the unlearned judging for themſelves. But one obſervation is ſufficient to remove every difficulty on this article, and give perfect eaſe to the underſtanding — That without ſuppoſing the whole body of the learned uniting in one common deſign of impoſing upon thoſe who cannot examine into the originals with their own eyes, there can be no poſſible deception in this matter; which, conſidering the diſtance of countries, and ages, ſeparate intereſts, and the oppoſition of different religious parties, is morally impoſſible. The unlearned, therefore, have all the ſecurity their hearts can deſire concerning every thing of importance in Chriſtianity. They have more ſecurity for the authenticity of the ſcriptures, and the genuine ſenſe of the originals, where a ſpirit of liberal examination is permitted, than that the tranſlation of any other book on earth exhibits fairly the ſentiments of its author — Amidſt all the various tranſlations of the ſacred volumes, and all the variety of deep and ingenious criticiſms, ſo far as we are acquainted with them, there ſtill remains a unity ſufficient to direct our faith and morals, and that truly may be ſaid to leave the capital doctrines and duties of Chriſtianity unaffected.

BUT *thirdly*, if it ſhould be admitted that many by themſelves are incapable of underſtanding the Scriptures,

tures, what, ſhould hinder private Chriſtians of weaker capacities from the advantage of thoſe friendly aids that are freely offered to them from all quarters — the labours of men of clear heads, great erudition, and honeſt hearts, who ſeem evidently to have ſearched the truth for its own ſake, who never once entertained a thought of making a monopoly of the Scriptures, or eſtabliſhing their own judgments into a public ſtandard; and who were incapable of the wickedneſs, had it been in their power, of rearing up a ſpiritual juriſdiction on the ignorance, credulity, and ſuperſtition of mankind? While ſuch friendly aids remain, the moſt ignorant may be inſtructed, and, if they are truly diſpoſed, arrive at ſome confidence in their own minds that "theſe things are ſo."

BUT learned and good men may differ. So they may, and ſo they do, and it is of importance that they ſhould: becauſe thoſe points in which they agree, and which, as hath been juſt now obſerved, are the capital doctrines and duties of Chriſtianity, are hereby rendered more certain, and free from every ſuſpicion of fraud and deſign.—Now while theſe doctrines and duties are univerſally acknowledged, every honeſt man of a plain underſtanding may certainly determine, from *their* nature and tendency, the real ſpirit and genius of Chriſtianity, and may thereby be enabled, in a great meaſure, to fix a teſt by which he may ſatisfy his own mind, concerning differences of leſſer importance that may happen among the learned. —— But if, after all, private Chriſtians ſhould on ſome occaſions be at a loſs to arrive at certainty amidſt contending parties, there is no remedy; they

muſt

muſt make the beſt uſe of their underſtandings they can, and reſt there. For who doth not ſee that it is infinitely preferable to ſubmit to a partial evil, than to eſtabliſh a general rule that would deſtroy liberty of inquiry altogether, with regard to thoſe who had capacity and opportunities, without furniſhing thoſe who had neither with one degree of more certainty as to the grounds of their faith; but, on the contrary, would expoſe both learned and unlearned, wiſe men and fools, to every error and ſuperſtitious deluſion, that would moſt effectually anſwer the purpoſes of thoſe eccleſiaſtics, who, under pretence of divine authority, had aſſumed the leading of their underſtandings and conſciences.

IT is of no purpoſe to ſay, that ſtill the weak and the ignorant would be directed in their creed, and led by ſomebody: becauſe, ſuppoſing the fact, it is a voluntary ſubmiſſion. It is a ſubmiſſion that ariſes, or is ſuppoſed to ariſe from their own choice. They are bound down by no coercive power, nor obliged to receive, under the terror of the moſt dreadful penal ſanctions *here*, and damnation *hereafter*, whatever opinions or practices may be ſtamped with *church* authority, and injuriouſly obtruded upon them. What they aſſent to this day, upon further inquiry, and better information, they may retract to-morrow; and are under no reſtraint, but what ariſes from the free exerciſe of their intellectual powers, and the genuine dictates of their own conſciences.—This is RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, which, next to the proper improvement of it, is the moſt valuable bleſſing that heaven can beſtow on man.

SECT.

SECT. V.

OF RELIGIOUS ORDER.

THERE is not any thing that ſeems to be leſs underſtood than *order* in religion. In its general idea, it is ſuppoſed to include *uniformity* with regard to certain articles of faith, and a certain mode of external worſhip. This is a notion that *prieſts* in every age and country have been at the utmoſt pains to inculcate. *Here* they have exhauſted much eloquence, while they have declaimed in all the rage of holy indignation againſt hereſy, ſchiſm, ſectariſm, free thinking, and all the myriads of evils that ſpring from diviſions in religion. Nor is it to be wondered at, that they ſhould. It is one of the moſt ſucceſsful engines of their craft—For this uniformity of opinions, and mode of worſhip, being impoſſible if men are left to conſult the Scriptures, and their own underſtandings, or to form a judgment from the beſt helps that their opportunities in life can furniſh; it follows that ſome public eſtabliſhment is neceſſary, by which common articles of faith, and a common ritual ought to be defined and aſcertained; and who is able, or who hath a right in an article ſo ſacred —but the *church?*

THAT the Romaniſts ſhould have availed themſelves of this ſort of reaſoning, with thoſe who were weak and ſuperſtitious enough to be ſatisfied with it, is by no means matter of ſurpriſe; and they are, at leaſt conſiſtent

ſiſtent with themſelves: but that it ever ſhould have entered into the head of proteſtants, is aſtoniſhing; becauſe, if the argument be good for any thing, it is good for eſtabliſhing an univerſal ſpiritual monarchy; and there it would infalliby iſſue, if thoſe who are poſſeſſed of ſuch notions of religious order, as to brand all that differ from them with odious epithets, were veſted with adequate powers.

WHAT hath led men into this pernicious miſtake, ſeems in a great meaſure, to have been the ſtating an analogy between religion and civil government, where, in this point of view, there is no analogy at all—A certain, determined, order is neceſſary in civil government to the very exiſtence of it, becauſe, a conformity to certain external regulations being the foundation of its ſecurity and preſervation, muſt neceſſarily be the grand object of its cognizance; ſo that he who enjoys the benefit and protection of the laws, and yet pretends to act in oppoſition to them, is properly a *diſorderly* ſubject; but with regard to religion the caſe is quite different. Order here hath little dependence upon the externals of any kind, and ſuch externals as conſtitute this order extend no further, as a law, than the ſentiments of the ſmalleſt religious ſocieties, ſhould it be but two or three in the name of Chriſt, that may aſſemble for worſhip. The order of religion is a *moral* order. It is the order of a good heart, and a converſation becoming the Goſpel—Order, if it carry any idea at all in it, is the proper arrangement and relation of certain parts, as theſe parts are connected with a particular end or deſign: nothing, therefore, can be diſorderly with regard

gard to that end which is moſt ſubſervient in promoting it. Now in religion, beyond all doubt, the great end is approving ovrſelves to God; and the means moſt ſubſervient to this end—doing his will. Hence he is the moſt *orderly* chriſtian who is at the greateſt pains to know the will of God, and moſt conſcientious in performing it.

BUT though order, as denoting *uniformity*, can never become national, nor prevail to any conſiderable degree, where men are left to the free exerciſe of their underſtandings—unawed by Eccleſiaſtic terrors—unbribed by public rewards; ſtill there will be found union ſufficient to form little ſocieties, connected by common opinions, one common mode of worſhip, or ſome more general principles, who reſting, each upon their own bottom, could never think, conſiſtently with themſelves, of aſſuming an authority over, or pretending to dictate to one another.

BUT ſuppoſing what variety in religious ſentiments and modes of worſhip you pleaſe, may it not be modeſtly aſked, what harm, what real injury to ſociety or individuals can ariſe from this variety? Are any of thoſe laws violated on which the publick welfare depends? Is there any uſurpation attempted upon the property, the underſtanding, or conſcience of another? Is any man his brother's keeper, or is he accountable for him? To theſe queſtions it ſurely may be anſwered with great confidence—that, if the ſubject be confined wholly to religion, there can be no harm at all, no injury to public or private happineſs. "If thou doſt well ſhalt thou

not be accepted? And if thou doſt not well, ſin lieth at the door." Worldly ends and the means neceſſary for accompliſhing them may juſtle together, becauſe thoſe means are very limited, and the point we aim at, if occupied by one, cannot be poſſeſſed by another: hence a thouſand accidents may every day occur to produce jealouſies and oppoſition: but what ſhould diſturb one man about the religious ſentiments of another—where, if the means ſhould differ, or if they ſhould agree, they do not interfere with one another—where, they may differ and the ſame end be obtained? What, but an intolerating ſpirit, the effect of a mind contracted by the moſt illiberal prejudices; what, but an arrogance of ſoul, the effect of intellectual pride, rendered fierce by ſuppoſed oppoſition; what, but the luſt of ſpiritual dominion, the effect of *prieſtly* policy ſhould awaken animoſity and ill nature *here*? "We are actuated by no ſuch illiberal views: no animoſity, no ill nature. We are prompted by a warm ſenſibility—a generous concern for the beſt intereſts of our fellow men. Can we ſee them expoſed to ſuch imminent danger—wandering in the paths of error and ready to periſh, without one friendly emotion, or one endeavour to reclaim them? What you moſt uncharitably call prejudice, policy, pride, and fierceneſs of temper, is truly the overflowing of a benevolent heart, touched with a ſenſe of human miſery—that would "have compaſſion, pulling them out of the fire." What ſurprizing care do theſe patrons of *religious order* take of other peoples conſciences! This is ſurely amazingly generous and kind hearted; and it were a pity not to permit them to lend their beſt aſſiſtance, and to adminiſter their kindeſt offices

fices — Well, be it ſo: but let me aſk in what manner would ye gratify theſe very tender feelings? "We would convert ſchiſmatics of every denomination to the purity of faith and worſhip — one faith, one Lord, one baptiſm;" *that is*, you would endeavour to make them think juſt as you do: quite right. But by what means? "We would be at all pains to convince them by reaſon, by argument, by informing their underſtandings and removing every conſcientious ſcruple — We would weep over them, we would pray for them." Still excellent — But if after all your pious labours they ſhould remain obſtinate ſchiſmatics, would you proceed one ſtep further? You are ſilent, and ſo far you are honeſt; for you cannot fairly conſult your own hearts and ſay you would not. No man knows where he is to ſtop, once he begins to meddle with the religious opinions of another; becauſe the very attempt muſt proceed from want of that candour — that charity and enlargement of mind which is formed by rational inquiry, and a real conviction of the truth. Such have been led to believe through accident; and they can perceive no reaſon why others ſhould not believe in the ſame manner. They depend not, therefore, upon argument but authority. If you ſee with their eyes, it is well; but if you will uſe your own, you may be fully aſſured, that the ſeverity of penal laws, if the power ſhall be unhappily lodged in their hands, will convince you of your obſtinacy — Or if they can go no further, they will ſhow what manner of ſpirit they are of, by giving you fairly over to the devil, ſo far as their intereſt goes — In vain, therefore, do theſe patrons of religious uniformity talk of liberty, of conſcience, of reaſon and ar-

gument. They are at bottom the enemies of conſcience and private judgment — Their ſympathy is all grimace — Their tears would bring tears of blood from the eyes of thoſe they pretend to pity — Their admonitions would be more wounding than the ſting of a ſerpent — and their prayers but a gloomy prelude to the ames.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

OF THE CHURCH.

SECT I.

OF THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

AS this term hath been made uſe of in the preceding chapters as generally underſtood by eccleſiaſtics, for an order of men, not only diſtinguiſhed from particular chriſtian ſocieties, but the collective body of chriſtians;—an order of men ſuppoſed to be poſſeſſed of certain excluſive ſpiritual powers; we ſhall now endeavour to fix the genuine meaning of it from the ſacred writings.

IF we look into the goſpels, we find the word not mentioned but on two different occaſions. The *one* is, where our Lord refers the caſe of contending parties to the church, "If thy brother neglect to hear thee tell it to the church:" and here it is ſufficiently plain, either that the ordinary forms of deciſion in the Jewiſh eccleſiaſtic courts are intended, or the particular religious community, of which the perſon offending was an immediate member. Before one or other of *theſe*, the complaining party was to bring his cauſe, and expect redreſs.—The laſt, however, ſeems to have been the method approved of by the Apoſtle, of deciding controverſies among the primitive Chriſtians; "I ſpeak to

your ſhame, is there not a wiſe man among you, not one who ſhall be able to judge between his brother, but brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers." But whether this reference was to be made to the ſanhedrim or the ſynagogue, it makes no difference. It can throw no light upon our inquiry into the nature and conſtitution of a chriſtian church.

The *other* paſſage, where this word occurs, deſerves a little more attention; "And I ſay unto thee, thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build *my* church." Here, it muſt be acknowledged, that Chriſt evidently points to the conſtitution of a *Chriſtian* church; and it is well known what a handle the Romaniſts make of theſe words;—preſumptuouſly pretending, that Peter is here veſted with the ſole headſhip of the church of Chriſt, with the excluſive right of the *keys*; and thence deriving the exorbitant and impious claims of the Pope.—But, how is it poſſible for one to determine any thing with certainty from this general declaration, ſuppoſing the purpoſe to have been of building a church upon Peter? A thouſand different conjectures, as the fancy or views of individuals ſhould lead them, might be formed concerning this church and its foundation; but no man of a ſound underſtanding, or honeſt heart, would pretend to affirm, that, from this ſingle paſſage, any deciſive concluſion could be deduced, in ſupport of any particular model or conſtitution of church government.

BUT, perhaps, the hiſtory of Peter, in other parts of the ſacred writings, may clear up, and direct us in, this matter. *There* we *may* be more particularly informed what

what pre-eminence he had above the other Apoſtles, and by what peculiar powers he was diſtinguiſhed; what regulations he hath left concerning the eſtabliſhment and government of a chriſtian church, to whom he hath bequeathed his paramount powers, by what particular characters his ſucceſſors are marked out, and in what manner the ſucceſſion is to be carried forward and perpetuated. All this had been very well, and would have certainly ended the diſpute; but there happens unluckily no ſuch inſtructions to be found; not one hint of one or other of theſe particulars in his own epiſtles, nor in any part of the book of God. We read of no pre-eminence, no delegated powers, no eſtabliſhed ſucceſſion, no model of a chriſtian church, no fixed ſtandard, by which the order and diſcipline of it was to be conducted. So that conſidering the paſſage, as having an immediate reference to the conſtitution of a chriſtian church built on the authority given to Peter;—it leaves us without ideas altogether.

BUT there is another view, in which it is commonly underſtood among proteſtants, that has a plain, ſenſible, and pertinent meaning;—that by the rock on which Chriſt was to build his church, our Lord intends the particular doctrine which Peter expreſſed in his confeſſion, and which he declares fleſh and blood had not revealed to him. In this ſenſe, whatever is intended by *my church*, the foundation of it was to be laid in the belief and acknowledgment of this propoſition, "*That Chriſt is the Son of the living God*;" for this is the very acknowledgment or confeſſion which our Lord takes notice of, and immediately aſcribes to a higher original

nal than fleſh and blood.—Wherever, therefore, this capital article is believed, and openly expreſſed in the ſenſe in which Peter expreſſes it, and the New Teſtament explains it;—there doth the church of Chriſt exiſt in its original purity.—Every diſtinct ſociety profeſſing this faith, is a diſtinct church; and the whole body of believers taken together is the church univerſal, or catholic, redeemed by his blood.

IT hath been obſerved by a late author, that Chriſt *here*, more probably refers to Peter's teſtimony, or his evidence as a witneſs, than to his confeſſion — as if he had ſaid, "I conſtitute thee Peter a witneſs, and upon this teſtimony of thine I will build my church." But with all due deference to the ſuperior erudition of this writer; we cannot poſſibly conceive the propriety or juſtice of this explication; becauſe there is evidently a *ſpeciality* intended in this paſſage, and there appears nothing peculiar to Peter as a witneſs of his Lord — Beſides, the church of Chriſt is built, not on the teſtimony of one Apoſtle, but on the foundation of the prophets and apoſtles; on the collective evidence that ariſes from the old and new diſpenſation. — But there is one truth that lies at the foundation of Chriſtianity, and without which it hath no exiſtence, "that Chriſt is the ſon of the living God;" and therefore the apoſtolic writings reſolve the whole of Chriſtianity into the belief of it: "Whoſoever ſhall confeſs that Jeſus is the ſon of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God — He that believeth on the ſon of God hath the witneſs in himſelf—That is the word of faith which we preach, that if thou ſhalt confeſs with thy mouth the Lord Jeſus, and ſhalt believe in

in thine heart that God raiſed him from the dead, thou ſhalt be ſaved — Whoſo believeth that Jeſus is the Chriſt is born of God." This truth, therefore, may be juſtly conſidered as the rock intended by our Lord. And, indeed, what can be a more ſignificant ſymbol of it than a rock — an immoveable ſecurity and defence — a hiding place from the wind — a covert from the tempeſt — a refreſhing ſhadow in a weary land? A ſtone erected into a pillar, or ſtones piled into a heap, it is acknowledged were anciently uſed as memorials of perſonal covenants and mercies as well as public tranſactions; and ſeem to have been continued in one or other of theſe views from the firſt ages to monuments that ſtill remain; and therefore may be allowed to be proper ſymbols of teſtimony; but a rock leads us to the juſteſt idea of this grand truth, on which all our hopes as Chriſtians are founded. And are not the foundations of the Chriſtian's hope, and the foundations of the Chriſtian church the ſame? Our Lord, therefore, aſſures Peter, that the belief of this truth ſhould in all ages unite his followers into one body, be the common object of their hope and joy, and render them, in oppoſition to all the inſtruments and deſigns of hell, impregnable like a rock.

SECT. II.

OF THE CONFORMITY OF THIS IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO THE APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE.

THE number of chriſtian converts who aſſembled together after our Lord's reſurrection were one hundred and twenty. Soon after, by means of Peter's preaching, there thouſand ſouls were added, ſo that the whole

whole chriſtian ſociety, at time, amounted to three thouſand one hundred and twenty, who, "continuing daily with one acccord in the temple, and breaking bread from houſe to houſe, did eat their meat with gladneſs and ſingleneſs of heart, praiſing God." What is ſubjoined by the ſacred hiſtorian deſerves attention—"And the Lord added daily to the church ſuch as ſhould be ſaved." Can words be more explicit to aſcertain the Apoſtolic idea of a chriſtian church? For of whom, poſſibly, can the writer ſpeak but of theſe three thouſand one hundred and twenty? Theſe converts, therefore, taken together were, at that time, the church of Chriſt: and as the number of believers encreaſed, the church became enlarged in her collective capacity. But in proportion to her encreaſe, different and diſtinct ſocieties were of courſe formed, disjoined from one another by countries and ſeas—ſometimes conſiſting of many, more frequently of few members. To hold correſpondence with one another, much more to meet in one common aſſembly was impoſſible. It was neceſſary therefore, that whatever rights belonged to the common body, ſhould likewiſe belong to theſe ſeparate ſocieties—Accordingly, however ſmall and inconſiderable, if united together in the name, and as profeſſing diſciples of Chriſt, theſe ſocieties are always conſidered, and addreſſed as a chriſtian church. If any one who hath read the Apoſtolic writings could be ſuppoſed ignorant of this, let him attend to the following paſſages: "As for Saul he made havock of the *church*, entering into every houſe, and hauling men and women, committed them to priſon." Here it is evident, that by the church is meant the body of chriſtians in general, who were thus miſerable

miſerably haraſſed in their ſeparate ſocieties and retreats by this bloody perſecutor, ſo that hardly an individual could aſſure himſelf of ſafety—" And it came to paſs that they (Paul and Barnabas) aſſembled themſelves a whole year with the *church* at Antioch, and the diſciples were called chriſtians firſt at Antioch." It is no leſs plain from this paſſage, that theſe chriſtians who firſt met together for religious worſhip at Antioch in the name of Chriſt, and from which they were denominated chriſtians, are called the church: and it is to be carefully noted that they do not receive this deſcription on account of Paul and Barnabas joining their ſociety; for *they* are ſaid expreſsly to have aſſembled *themſelves* with the church. Beſides, neither of theſe had, at this time received any ſpecial commiſſion as public miniſters of chriſtianity—" Unto whom not only I give thanks but the *churches* among the Gentiles," that is the different chriſtian ſocieties ſcattered among the Gentiles " likewiſe greet the *church* that is in their houſe (the houſe of Aquila and Priſcilla) " ſalute Nymphas and the *church* that is in the houſe — Paul unto Philemon, and the *church* that is in his houſe." It is not certain even, whether by the church in the three laſt paſſages is to be underſtood more than the very members of the family. However this be, many might be quoted to prove, beyond doubt, that the Apoſtles always conſider a ſociety of chriſtians, whether larger or ſmaller profeſſedly met to worſhip in the name of Jeſus Chriſt, as a chriſtian church.

IN confirmation of this account, it is to be obſerved, that there is not one ſuggeſtion in all the new teſtament, that

that the Apoſtles or Elders, or any denomination of eccleſiaſtic officers, conſtituted the church. On the contrary, they are evidently diſtinguiſhed from the church, and conſulted on momentous occaſions with it.

When the great controverſy aroſe concerning certain obſervances which the Jewiſh converts would have impoſed upon thoſe of the Gentiles, and the queſtion became warm, delegates were immediately diſpatched from Antioch to Jeruſalem to conſult with the *church* there about this weighty matter; "And when they were to come to Jeruſalem they were received of the *church*, and the *Apoſtles* and *Elders*." Who does not ſee that the church is here conſidered as a diſtinct body from the Apoſtles and Elders? Again, "Then pleaſed it the Apoſtles and Elders with the whole *church* to ſend choſen men of their own company with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, and wrote letters to them after this manner—The Apoſtles and Elders and Brethren (or Church) ſend greeting." Is it poſſible for words to render it more plain, that the church in thoſe days conſiſted, not of Apoſtles or Elders, or of Eccleſiaſtic officers of any kind met togeher to deliberate concerning doctrine or diſcipline, but in the ſociety and fellowſhip of chriſtians profeſſing one common faith, and joining together in love and charity in common acts of worſhip.

As chriſtians thus aſſembled were always denominated the *church*; ſo the Apoſtles conſider *them* as having a common right to determine in every important queſtion. Accordingly, when the point concerning circumciſion came to be maturely deliberated upon, inſtead of taking the deciſion

deciſion of it entirely upon themſelves in virtue of their peculiar powers, the Apoſtles and Elders conſulted with, and act agreeably to the common voice of the chriſtian ſociety or *church*: "Then pleaſed it the Apoſtles and Elders with the whole *church*."—As a further proof that the primitive miniſters of religion acted in concert with the ſociety of chriſtians in every matter of public concern, it may be remarked, that when the anſwer to be returned to the *church* at Antioch was finally agreed upon, and they had reſolved to ſend two of their own number, Paul and Barnabas, to report the deciſion, they ſaw it proper to join in the commiſſion with them, "Judas and Silas choſen men among the brethren," that it might appear to be the common determination of the Apoſtles, Elders, and the *Church*—So cautious ſeem even thoſe extraordinary miniſters to have been, of giving the leaſt ſuſpicion of aſſuming a dominion over the faith of chriſtians. Whatever powers, therefore, the church of Chriſt may be poſſeſſed of, they belong *radically* to every chriſtian ſociety aſſembled for the great purpoſe of promoting the intereſts of religion—private or public edification, ſo far as they are animated by the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, and directed by the laws of it—it being impoſſible that the whole body of chriſtians ſhould at any time, the firſt church excepted, have united in one common ſociety.

SECT.

SECT. III.

OF THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS.

A QUESTION will probably ariſe from what hath been advanced on this ſubject that claims ſome attention. What then were the apoſtles and elders? Did they hold no ſuperior rank, and were they veſted with no ſpecial powers as diſtinguiſhed from the body of Chriſtians in general? They certainly held a ſuperior rank. They certainly were endowed with extraordinary powers, and were authoriſed by an extraordinary mandate. The Apoſtles were choſen as witneſſes for their Lord, and were honoured to lay open his divine embaſſy in all its extent: but as the grand truths, and moſt comfortable doctrines of Chriſtianity depend upon events, which, though often hinted at, and, on ſome occaſions, expreſsly foretold by their Divine Maſter, they could not be brought to believe, his ſufferings, death, and reſurrection; and, as it was neceſſary that theſe events ſhould take place before the ineſtimable bleſſings founded upon them ſhould be exhibited and explained, it was not till our Lord actually roſe from the grave that his Apoſtles were furniſhed with evidence, and endowed with ſuitable powers to execute their commiſſion. This commiſſion they firſt opened on the day pentecoſt; and by addreſſing themſelves to a numerous aſſembly of different nations and languages — to every one in his own tongue, and by preaching "Jeſus that he was the Chriſt" now riſen from the dead, and remiſſion of ſins by him, they were enabled

abled to lay the foundation of the chriſtian church.—And from their whole hiſtory it appears, that their peculiar work lay in unfolding the plan of the goſpel, converting unbelievers to the faith, and forming diſtinct chriſtian ſocieties, or churches, in the courſe of their pious and ſucceſsful labours; and of which they themſelves were the ſpiritual fathers, inſtructors, and guides, ſo long as they could remain among them, and had opportunity to correſpond with them.—But though the Apoſtles were the firſt planters of the chriſtian vineyard, yet they were not equal to the taſk of extending it in every quarter, and of watering it in every corner. Their inſtructions were highly neceſſary as a general and public ſtandard, but they were not alone ſufficient in every exigence. For this purpoſe ſubſidiary aids were appointed; men of diſtinguiſhed piety and wiſdom, and qualified by miraculous and extraordinary powers, to ſuperintend the ſpiritual concerns of different chriſtian ſocieties. Theſe were the elders of whom we ſo frequently read, who are particularly diſtinguiſhed from the Apoſtles, as appears from the embaſſy ſent from Jeruſalem to Antioch in the paſſage above quoted; and who evidently bore an inferior office: being either appointed by the Apoſtles themſelves, or by others, having an immediate commiſſion for that purpoſe.—Theſe again were men who held a middle claſs between the Apoſtles and Elders, and who accompanied and aſſiſted them in their itinerary labours; of which number were Timothy and Titus, of whom we ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak afterwards.—Beſides theſe, there were prophets and teachers, whoſe commiſſion and powers were more limited. But all of them, whether apoſtles, elders, evangeliſts, prophets, or teach-

ers, were extraordinary miniſters, and furniſhed with different gifts ſuited to the particular ſphere in which they were called to act.—Indeed, without ſuch a multiplicity of gifts, thoſe infant ſocieties could have never been preſerved amidſt ſo many dangers, nor fortified amidſt ſo many and great trials: for, beſides perſecution from the eſtabliſhed church, and the civil powers prompted by it, falſe teachers were on every ſide, and in their boſoms;—to ſow tares, to pervert the mind from the ſimplicity of the goſpel, and to ſtrengthen prejudices not ſufficiently removed. It was, therefore, neceſſary, that there ſhould be faithful guides at hand to conſult with, and amidſt every difficulty to adminiſter aid and conſolation.

BUT were not the Apoſtles, Elders? The Apoſtles Peter and John expreſly call themſelves ſo: but this muſt, certainly, regard ſome *peculiarity* touching theſe Apoſtles, or as the office of apoſtleſhip, in general, led them to act on particular occaſions, as paſtors of diſtinct chriſtian ſocieties. However this be, it can admit of no doubt, that the Apoſtles, as ſuch, were diſtinguiſhed from every inferior order by this;—that they received their commiſſion, and derived their authority, immediately from Chriſt himſelf, with original powers to teach the doctrines, and eſtabliſh the laws of his ſpiritual kingdom.

FROM this idea of a chriſtian church, a queſtion now ariſes of the greateſt importance upon this ſubject:—Whether it appears from the New Teſtament, that any eſtabliſhed connection doth *now* ſubſiſt between thoſe primary

primary miniſters of religion, and any ſubſequent order of men, whatever name they may aſſume: the right which the *laſt* holds being mediately derived from the *firſt*, in virtue of an original divine appointment, and a regular unbroken ſucceſſion; ſo that thoſe who belong to *this* order are to be properly conſidered as *their* ſucceſſors, and veſted with certain miniſterial powers, which the churches or chriſtian ſocieties cannot confer?—Or whether the appointment of the miniſters of religion doth not ultimately reſt on the conſtitution of ſuch chriſtian ſocieties, and belong to them as their excluſive right?—To arrive at ſome certainty in this capital point, is the deſign of the following chapters.

CHAP. V.

OF APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION.

SECT. I.

OF THE STATE OF THE QUESTION.

THE advocates for uninterrupted ſucceſſion are pleaſed to aſk thoſe who accuſe them of holding a *lame genealogy*, to point out to them where this ſucceſſion hath failed;—the age, the country, the place, the time where it hath ſuffered interruption? But I apprehend, nothing can be more unreaſonable than ſuch a queſtion.—Here is a poſitive and bold claim to a high rank and dignity; a rank and dignity to which nothing can be produced ſimilar in the common order of Providence; a claim to the dignity of an embaſſador from heaven.—Here is a claim to a ſacred office upon the authority of a divine conſtitution and appointment, in which the whole body of Chriſtians are not only concerned, but on which, in no ſmall meaſure, their happineſs as moral and accountable beings is ſuppoſed to depend: is it not agreeable to common ſenſe, and to all our notions of common equity, that the claimants, in a caſe ſo ſingular and important, ſhould fairly make out their pretenſions; that they ſhould ſhow, that the commiſſion, which they pretend to hold, is properly authenticated, and that the powers which they aſſume, are clearly included in it?—If, pretending to be the lineal deſcendant

deſcendant of an antient and illuſtrious family, I claim a title to the original honours, am I to prove my right by giving a public defiance to diſcover any impoſition, or am I to exhibit a regular ſucceſſion, agreeably to the conſtitution of my country, terminating in my own perſon? Such a defiance would certainly be conſidered as an infallible proof of inſanity. I muſt poſitively prove my propinquity to the firſt poſſeſſor of the honours claimed, or, at leaſt, to one in poſſeſſion of them, where the prior claim was ſelf-evident;—and this propinquity exactly according to the ſucceſſion eſtabliſhed in the original grant. No other method could be received as a credible ground of evidence; and that for this plain reaſon, one may be unable to diſprove an alledged fact, and yet preſumptions ſo violent may be againſt it, as muſt greatly weaken the credit of it.—We may entertain ſhrewd ſuſpicions from the nature of the fact itſelf, or the circumſtances that attend it; ſo that an allegation upon general principles, without a ſtrict and poſitive inveſtigation, cannot poſſibly give us that ſatisfaction which the importance of the caſe may require. Perhaps this obſervation may ſeldom or never be applicable to the tranſmiſſion of an eſtate or honours, becauſe no one would be ſo wild as to give in ſo general and vague a claim; but it is certainly applicable in general where the intereſt of another is concerned, much more, where the common privileges of chriſtianity are limited by it.

SUPPOSING, therefore, at preſent, that it could not be ſhown in what particular inſtances this ſucceſſion hath failed, there certainly lie preſumptions, from the ſtate of primitive chriſtianity, and the extraordinary qualifi-

cations of its miniſters, againſt the credibility of ſuch a ſucceſſion, that render this a claim highly improbable; and which, therefore, abſolutely requires that theſe gentlemen ſhould prove their ſpiritual pedigree. For who dare, in good faith, venture to affirm, that, even in the apoſtolic age, much more in the ſucceeding ages, amidſt ſo many perſecutions by which chriſtians were ſcattered, or thrown into diſtinct ſocieties, widely ſeparated from one another; amidſt ſo many preſcriptions, ſo many migrations from one place of ſafety to another; amidſt ſo many political conteſts and religious diſputes; amidſt ſo many diviſions and contradictory opinions, that ſo early prevailed among chriſtians themſelves; amidſt the ignorance and credulity of the multitude, and the preſumption or policy of eccleſiaſtics;—who dare affirm with any aſſurance, or any probable ground of conviction, that the ſucceſſion of *prieſts* hath been perpetuated, deriving their claims from one common apoſtolic ſource? Such a ſucceſſion would, it may be maintained, have been morally impoſſible, without an immediate and continued interpoſition of divine Providence.—It would have been impoſſible, even, to have perpetuated and preſerved pure the Jewiſh prieſthood, where there could have been no diſpute concerning the order and manner of ſucceſſion, if that eccleſiaſtic policy had not been directed and carried forward by the peculiar ſuperintendency and guardianſhip of Jehovah himſelf.—In order, therefore, to ſave this conſtitution from the innovations that muſt have been naturally introduced in the ordinary courſe of things, the Jews were ſhut out, in a great meaſure, from intercourſe with other nations, and remained a diſtinct and almoſt an unknown people. They were

were hedged about with penal laws on every ſide, executed by God himſelf, as their ſupreme magiſtrate; and the nations around them were reſtrained and overawed from meddling with them, except when employed as the inſtruments of the divine juſtice to puniſh their idolatry or diſobedience. Thus their civil and eccleſiaſtic œconomy, but more eſpecially the latter, was preſerved from innovations of every kind, by means which no other nation ever enjoyed;—by means which chriſtianity gives us no room to look for. We may, therefore, conclude, that no religious eſtabliſhment, in the order of ſucceſſion ſimilar to this, was ever intended; becauſe it ſeems ſelf-evident, that the one could not ſubſiſt without the other.

BUT, not to take theſe pretenders to apoſtolic ſucceſſion too ſhort, or to ſeem to avoid this argument in any point of view: we return this poſitive anſwer to their queſtion — when or where hath this ſucceſſion failed? It failed, in the *primary* view, with the Apoſtles: it failed, in the *ſecondary* view, when thoſe immediately appointed by them, or having a direct commiſſion to appoint others were no more: becauſe no ſucceſſion can be perpetuated, but in virtue of ſimilar powers, or ſome definitive law, or ſtanding commiſſion from thoſe having original authority, by which this ſucceſſion is aſcertained, carried forward, and authenticated through every gradation of it. This propoſition which, we preſume, will appear to reſt on the moſt rational principles, we ſhall endeavour in the ſequel to illuſtrate and confirm.

SECT. II.

WHETHER THERE IS ANY LAW LIMITING MINISTERIAL SUCCESSION, OR EXPLAINING IN WHAT ORDER IT IS TO BE CARRIED FORWARD AND PERPETUATED.

IT hath already been obſerved, that the Apoſtles were men choſen to be witneſſes for their Lord. They heard his doctrine, they ſaw his miracles, and converſed with him after his reſurrection. And as they had uncommon means of conviction, they were endowed with uncommon powers, and had an uncommon commiſſion to execute — to teach all nations: a commiſſion attended with inſuperable difficulties without ſuch powers: nor have we evidence from ſcripture that this work was the immediate object, or peculiar province of any but thoſe who were veſted with this commiſſion. In confirmation of this, we may further obſerve, that when Judas who had been numbered among the *twelve*, and had obtained a part of their miniſtry, had "gone to his place," they do not, in virtue of any powers they had received, preſume to fill up this vacancy; but nominate two of thoſe men "that had companied with them all the time that the Lord Jeſus went out and in among them, beginning from the baptiſm of John unto the ſame day that Jeſus was taken up from them, to be ordained witneſſes with them of his reſurrection," and appeal to heaven for a deciſion; "and they prayed and ſaid, thou Lord who knoweſt the hearts of all men, ſhew whether of theſe men thou haſt choſen, that he may take part of this miniſtry

niſtry and apoſtleſhip, from which Judas by tranſgreſſion fell; and they gave forth their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the Apoſtles." In further proof and illuſtration of this, we find, that Barnabas and Saul, being marked out for this office, they receive their appointment by immediate nomination from heaven, "ſeparate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work unto which I have deſigned them." Thus it is evident, that the work of apoſtleſhip was not to be the effect of the moſt perfect human wiſdom or determination. — The Apoſtles, therefore, neither had, nor could have had any ſucceſſors by a deſignation of their own. They attempt no ſuch thing, nor is any ſucceſſion in this channel to be looked for.

WE muſt direct our views, therefore, for miniſterial ſucceſſion to ſome other quarter:—Either to thoſe who watered the vineyard, in general, and were ſubſervient in promoting the intereſts of chriſtianity, where Providence ordered their labours:—or to thoſe to whom the overſight of certain churches were occaſionally committed:—or to the fixed paſtors of particular chriſtian aſſemblies. Of the *firſt*, there were probably many diſtinguiſhed with peculiar gifs and talents for public ſervice, "To one was given the ſpirit of the word wiſdom; to another the word of knowledge, by the ſame ſpirit; to another faith; to another the gift of healing, by the ſame ſpirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another diſcerning of ſpirits; to another diverſe kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues." Under theſe are probably comprehended all that variety of gifts by which the primitive church

church was gathered, enlarged, edified, comforted, eſtabliſhed. But it can admit of no doubt, that they were often beſtowed for ſpecial purpoſes, upon many who had no particular charge; and who acted ſometimes as they were directed by their own wiſdom and prudence, but more frequently as they were moved by the ſpirit.—Neither *here*, then, can we find any ſolid ground to reſt on. Theſe extraordinary itinerants were evidently intended as temporary miniſters, and cannot ſtand at the head of this ſucceſſion. We neither know properly the nature of their work, nor how far their commiſſion extended.

We muſt, therefore, in the *next* place, inquire what information on this ſubject can be gathered from thoſe who were immediately commiſſioned by the Apoſtles; and of this denomination, ſo far as I am able to recollect, there are only two, Timothy and Titus,—perhaps Philemon,—perhaps many more; but theſe two are the only perſons of whom we can ſpeak with certainty, as immediately appointed and employed for the public benefit of the churches.—And it is evident, from the accounts we have of both, that they were early companions of Paul in his travels and labours, and had never afterwards any fixed reſidence. We find the *one* at Epheſus, when Paul wrote his firſt epiſtle to him, and where he had formerly been with that Apoſtle, when he called together the elders of the church, and gave them his laſt affecting charge: here he remained for ſome time, at his requeſt, in order to rectify certain errors, and from thence departed into Macedonia.—The *other*, at Crete, where he had come, likewiſe, in his travels with Paul, and where he was left for a ſeaſon for important

tant purpoſes; but how long they reſpectively continued is, perhaps, uncertain. One thing is plain, that they acted as extraordinary men, by the immediate appointment, and under the immediate direction of an eminent Apoſtle: nor do we read of any more employed in the ſame work.—Without an *immediate* commiſſion from the Apoſtles, or a deputation of *ſecondary powers* to Timothy or Titus, none could aſſume this office. It even ſeems doubtful, if any but the Apoſtles themſelves were competent judges who were to act in this high capacity. Certainly they have committed no ſuch ſecondary powers to others. There is no ſuch thing in the New Teſtament as a deputation or mandate from the Apoſtles to Timothy or Titus to ordain colleagues in their office, and ſucceſſors in *their* room, when they ſhould be no more. I do not imagine, that there is any one who ſo much as pretends that there is. The office, therefore, that theſe two itinerant miniſters held, as much ceaſed with primitive chriſtianity, as the office of an Apoſtle.

IT will be admitted, however, that with regard to the appointment of elders, or fixed paſtors of particular chriſtian aſſemblies, the Apoſtle Paul did give ſecondary powers. "For this cauſe left I thee in Crete that thou ſhouldeſt ordain Elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." Here, therefore, in the *laſt* place, we muſt direct our views for miniſterial ſucceſſion. On this foundation we muſt neceſſarily build the Eccleſiaſtic ſuperſtructure, if on any at all. But how are we to proceed in this important buſineſs? Where is the rule? where is the law immediately regarding a ſucceſſion,

ſion, or that can poſſibly direct us? we receive the Apoſtolic mandate with great reſpect, and conſequently the Elders ordained by Titus as Eccleſiaſtics, veſted with a ſacred commiſſion, and which it was unlawful for any human authority to controul; but though we are diſpoſed to pay all due reverence to the Apoſtolic mandate, we can by no means agree to extend it farther than is expreſſed in it. This would be ſomething worſe than a miſtaken compliment. It would furniſh a handle for every aſſuming *prieſt* to act on a foundation, and claim an authority to which they can have no right—Paul we know, and Titus we know, and the Elders we know; *theſe*, though in different degrees, were diſtinguiſhed by the manifeſtation and extraordinary gifts of the ſpirit: and in ſuch hands the churches might well place unlimited confidence. But if we enquire concerning their ſucceſſors, the Scripture light fails us, and we have no guide to direct our path but the uſefulneſs and importance of the miniſterial office in general—For it were in vain to urge that the precedent before us, of ordaining elders in every city, carries ſufficient authority and direction in every future period of the chriſtian church; ſo that the miniſterial office is hereby limited to one order of men poſſeſſed of the ſole powers of carrying forward this ſucceſſion independent of the rights of common Chriſtianity. The Apoſtolic appointment ſhows, indeed, the propriety of the eſtabliſhment in general; that every chriſtian ſociety ought to have one elder or preſident, one of diſtinguiſhed piety and prudence, to adminiſter in the public inſtitutions of religion, to teach and admoniſh in public, to adviſe with in private, to direct, to comfort, and in general to officiate in ſacred

cred things; but it ſhows *not* according to what model or external form a ſucceſſion of chriſtian miniſters were to be continued, *nor* confers any powers on one order of men excluſive of another. Whatever perſonal powers even given to Timothy or Titus of ſetting apart to the paſtoral office, there is no general commiſſion given, in virtue of which a ſucceſſion of Eccleſiaſtics were to be perpetuated in a certain order, and diſtinguiſhed by peculiar ſpiritual powers: ſo that, admitting while thoſe, who were immediately appointed by the Apoſtles, or by others having ſecondary powers from them, continued in the church; admitting, even, while the miniſters of religion carried their own credentials in their hands, — the divine ſignature appended to their commiſſion, that the ſacred office had ſufficient evidence of its reſting on a divine conſtitution, as the peculiarity of the deſignation, and powers ſuited to it; after the Apoſtles or others having authority from them were gone; after the ceaſing of miraculous gifts, and no viſible diſtinction ſubſiſted between chriſtian miniſters and private chriſtians, it is impoſſible to ſpecify any law or authority by which the churches were bound; it may be affirmed with aſſurance that no Eccleſiaſtic living had a right to aſſume over any one ſociety of chriſtians, or to advance one claim, but what his capacity to edify, his ſuperior uſefulneſs, or the particular choice of a chriſtian community gave him.

IF it ſhould occur to any reader in oppoſition to what hath been immediately advanced, "that as the miniſters of religion, as far as we can obſerve from Scripture hiſtory, were ſelected by thoſe who preceded them, that preſumption

preſumption is, that things were to continue in the ſame train, eſpecially as the ſame occaſions for ſuch miniſtry continued in the churches." I would beg leave to give the following anſwer—That were the queſtion ſimply with regard to the tranſmiſſion of the miniſterial character, or the deſign of Providence in perpetuating that office in the church of Chriſt, the preſumption from antecedent facts ought, certainly, to be ſuſtained. But the queſtion here, and which, to every attentive reader, will appear through the whole of this inquiry to have been in the eye of the writer, is very different—Whether it appears from the ſacred record, that there is any pre-eſtabliſhed plan for the tranſmiſſion of this office; or whether a certain order of men are veſted with ſpecial powers for this purpoſe—And, whether the office thus tranſmitted in the eſtabliſhed order of ſucceſſion, is accompanied with certain other powers, which can alone be conferred in this way—powers ſuperior to the common rights of Chriſtianity, and which neither the collective body, could it be aſſembled, nor any ſociety of chriſtians, merely as ſuch, can poſſibly confer—Theſe are the queſtions to which our argument immediately leads us; and where we have already in ſome meaſure ſupported, and will endeavour ſtill further to ſupport the negative. Now, in this caſe, where the difference between the firſt and ſucceeding ages of Chriſtianity is ſo immenſe, where the examples inſiſted upon are ſo diſſimilar to the future ſtate Chriſtianity—to admit of a bare preſumption from precedents, would be a conception equally repugnant to all the principles of ſound reaſoning, and injurious to the intereſts of religion, the purity

purity of the faith, and that liberty with which Chriſt hath made us free.

ECCLESIASTICS, no doubt, would, and actually did early aſſume this excluſive right of tranſmiſſion, while, at the ſame time, they magnified certain miniſterial powers which they pretended to belong to it. Here prieſts began this craft, which hath been more or leſs maintained by every denomination ſince their days. Nor is there a poſſibility of pulling them from *this* their ſpiritual throne, but by expoſing the fallacy of this pretended chain; for while you grant the order of tranſmiſſion as fixed by the divine conſtitution, you may be aſſured that every other eccleſiaſtic claim will infallible riſe out of it — We aſk, therefore, and boldly aſk, where is this eccleſiaſtical commiſſion from the Apoſtles, or from Timothy, or Titus, or even from the elders? Doth it explain the nature? Doth it direct the manner of miniſterial ſucceſſion? Doth it inform us who are to judge of the qualifications of miniſters, by whom they are to be ordained, and to whom the right of nomination and election belongs? There is no ſuch commiſſion on divine record — nothing ſimilar to it or that can be explained into a law or directory upon this ſubject. Nor is it neceſſary that there ſhould: when it muſt appear to the whole world that the diſtinguiſhing work and labours of a miniſter in the ordinary ſtate of chriſtianity, required abilities only, which were to be found in every chriſtian ſociety — a capacity to teach, and to provide in adminiſtrating religious ordinances plain in their nature, obvious in their end, and intended for the benefit of all. — The manner, therefore, of miniſterial eſtabliſhment, in the

the common order of providence, is wholly left to be determined by the circumſtances, the judgment, and prudence of the churches.

THIS is, certainly, a concluſion to which we are neceſſarily led from the ſilence of the *new teſtament* upon this ſubject, compared with the clearneſs and preciſion which we obſerve in the *old* upon *one* entirely ſimilar. — *Here* you find a prieſthood by divine appointment ſettled into a ſacred conſtitution and perpetuated by an order and ſucceſſion obvious to all. Nothing is left to human diſcretion. The happineſs and proſperity of a people depended upon an exact obſervance of their publick ritual, and therefore the laws relative to it are minutely deſcriptive; ſo that were a million ſelected from different countries, and of different religious ſentiments, to read the deſcription of this eccleſiaſtic conſtitution, they would all, to a tittle, agree in the ſame account: and can we ſuppoſe that infinite wiſdom ſhould ſet aſide this diſpenſation, and introduce a new one with a ſucceſſion of miniſters peculiar to it, poſſeſſed of different degrees of eminence and ſpiritual power, and upon whoſe adminiſtration the happineſs of no ſmall part of his rational creation ſhould depend, and yet that the book containing this new diſpenſation ſhould not furniſh us with one inſtitute, or directory, by which we might be enabled to judge with ſome degree of evidence of the order of ſucceſſion, or the extent of miniſterial powers; that we ſhould be left to the uncertainty and confuſion of tradition, to vague conjectures, diſtant probabilities and precedents, and far fetched concluſions? Nothing, we apprehend, would be more inconſiſtent, or injurious to that wiſdom and

and goodneſs by which they were both framed and conducted.

SECT. III.

OF THE CAUSES THAT WOULD NATURALLY LEAD TO THIS IDEA OF APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION.

THOUGH it is ſufficiently plain to every one that reads the new teſtament, diveſted of thoſe early prejudices that bias the mind, and render it utterly incapable of every ſober and rational inquiry, that there is nothing in this divine record aſcertaining that particular mode of ſucceſſion, by which a chriſtian miniſtry is to be carried forward and perpetuated; nothing that looks like an eſtabliſhed eccleſiaſtic œconomy intended as a pattern or ſtandard for every future period, and to which we are bound to conform as a divine inſtitute; the churches, we may readily conjecture, would be naturally led to ſubmit to the direction of thoſe who had been appointed by the Apoſtles, or thoſe empowered by them. Let us put the caſe for inſtance, that Titus agreeably to Paul's inſtructions, did ordain elders in every city of Crete; though it doth not appear that theſe elders had any particular commiſſion of ordaining others, we may well conclude that, when a vacancy ſhould happen in any particular charge, or when the number of converts ſhould encreaſe, and demand a new ſupply — no Apoſtle, no Titus, none having an immediate or ſecondary commiſſion being preſent to whom they could have acceſs: that theſe elders would be conſidered as the fitteſt perſons for

judging of the qualifications of a proper ſucceſſor, or providing theſe new converts with a fixed paſtor — probably as having an inherent right of nomination. Their own appointment by Titus without any thing further, would be judged ſufficient authority, and the deſtination they would make, an act ſuitable to, and ariſing from their office.—And it ought, in general, to be allowed, that they who had devoted their time and beſt attention to the ſtudy of ſacred things, and had been received and approved of as miniſters of religion, were beſt qualified to judge of the talents of thoſe who were to labour in in the ſame field, and to carry forward the ſame work.— —But amidſt the fervour of that zeal, inſeperable almoſt from the firſt impreſſions of every ſpecies of religion, whether true or falſe, eſpecially when the blood is warmed, and the paſſions inflamed by violent oppoſition, as men never fail to be partial and precipitate, the firſt Chriſtians would not think of diſtinguiſhing between a fitneſs to judge of qualifications — a power proper to be lodged in the hands of a few, and neceſſary for the ends of publick edification — between this power, and a right of ordination and appointment veſted in the office: they would haſtily conſider both as belonging to it, and one of its eſſential and unalienable privileges: they would not think of marking with that attention and coolneſs, which the nature of the thing required, and to which a regard for chriſtian liberty ought to have led them, the important line intended to ſeparate between teachers poſſeſſed of miraculous powers, and honoured with a divine commiſſion, and others who, though they held a ſimilar office, received their denomination and importance from their work and uſefulneſs. And thus, the Apoſtolic

lic and ſucceeding ages would be confounded, and the ſame authority over the churches — the ſame powers of appointment and ordination ſuppoſed to belong to both — Eccleſiaſtics would ſeize and improve the opportunity, and would eſtabliſh themſelves into a conſtitution founded on precedent and traditional authority, too ſacred to admit of any innovations or encroachments from the laity. And in this mannner would be laid the foundation of all that arrogance and ſpiritual uſurpation, by which men calling themſelves the embaſſadors of heaven, and claiming powers which God never gave, and ſound policy ought to have withheld, have diſgraced the religion of Chriſt, and expoſed it to the ridicule of thoſe who are weak enough to judge of it from the falſe and preſumptuous claims of its miniſters.

CHAP. VI.

OF ORDINATION.

SECT I.

OF THE MANNER OF DESIGNATION TO THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE UNDER THE OLD DIPENSATION.

ORDINATION is the ſolemn act of ſetting apart one for the miniſterial office by prayer and laying on of hands; by which external rite the perſon thus ſet apart, among prieſts of every denomination, is ſuppoſed to receive certain ſpiritual powers characteriſtic of the office;—powers by which he is authoriſed to perform particular acts of religion, that formerly would have been not only incompetent for him, not only the higheſt preſumption and moſt ſacrilegious profanation, but which, without this ſacred deſignation, would loſe the whole efficacy appended to them. Theſe offices are fewer, or more numerous, according to the different notions of eccleſiaſtics; but all agree in diſtinguiſhing them by one common name,—called the *Sacraments*. Now, as it is ordination, or impoſition of hands, which, it is affirmed, gives validity to thoſe miniſterial acts; it is, ſurely, of the higheſt importance to Chriſtians to arrive at ſome ſatisfaction upon a ſubject in which they are ſo highly concerned.—We ſhall, therefore, endeavour, with the moſt ſacred regard to truth, ſo far as we can

can diſcover it, to trace this point as far back as the ſacred record can furniſh us with any light upon it. And, in this inveſtigation, we ſhall begin with laying before the candid reader the manner of appointment and deſignation to the prieſtly office, under the Jewiſh œconomy, that, as we proceed, he may be enabled to form a comparative view between *this* and the Chriſtian diſpenſation.

NOTHING can be more pompous or ſolemn than the inveſtiture into the prieſtly office, with which the Jewiſh ceremonial preſents us: "Take unto thee thy brother Aaron, and his ſons, that they may miniſter to me in the prieſts office:—and thou ſhalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty; and theſe are the garments which thou ſhalt make (ſee the whole deſcription, Lev. 28.) and thou ſhalt put the anointed oil upon his head, and his ſons head, and ſhalt anoint them, that they may miniſter to thee in the prieſt's office;—and the prieſt's office ſhall be theirs for a perpetual ſtatute" (ſee further the whole ceremonial attending the inauguration, Lev. chap. 29.)—It were to no purpoſe to enumerate, at large, things ſo well known. It is ſufficient to obſerve, that the miniſters of this religion were not ſet apart in a ſingle capacity, nor as diſtinguiſhed with temporary powers, but as repreſentative of a public inſtitution:—of an order and ſucceſſion of prieſts to be perpetuated during that diſpenſation. Upon this account their public inſtallment and conſecration, the ſacrifices and ceremonies attending it, are no leſs circumſtantial than ſingular in their nature. The family and line in which the office became hereditary,

is aſcertained by a public and remarkable law, precluding them from any territorial inheritance; and by another, no leſs remarkable, a proper ſubſiſtence is allotted for them, which, though ſeemingly precarious, became a ſacred part of their conſtitution, and remained inviolable to the end of it. Hence it was impoſſible for any uſurper to intrude into the prieſts office, or to take this honour to himſelf, but he that was called of God, as was Aaron; ſo that nothing is omitted to mark out thoſe to the obſervation of every individual, whom God had choſen to officiate in holy things, and as intermediate agents between him and his people.—As a further proof of this, it is worth while to obſerve, that as Aaron and his family bore but a ſmall proportion to the body of the people, and the tabernacle ſervice would neceſſarily become too burthenſome to them; we find a ſolemn deſignation of others to aſſiſt them in their public work. "And the Lord ſpake unto Moſes ſaying, take the Levites from among the children of Iſrael and cleanſe them, and thus ſhalt thou do unto them, &c.—and after that the Levites ſhall go in to do the ſervice of the tabernacle of the congregation,—for they are wholly given unto me." This order of men, though ſervants and under-workers for Aaron and his ſons, have their peculiar work aſſigned, and the preciſe line of diſtinction drawn between them and thoſe of a higher order; "Thou and thy ſons ſhall miniſter before the tabernacle of witneſs;—they ſhall keep thy charge, and the charge of the tabernacle, only they ſhall not come nigh the veſſels of the ſanctuary and the altar, that neither you nor they alſo die." In all this there can be no diſpute. The deſignation, the order, the perpetuity of ſucceſſion,

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are equally clear, particularly their conſecration and inſtallment; or the manner of appointment to their office, is deſcribed and aſcertained by the ſame authority by which they are called to the office itſelf;—with regard to the former, the order and perpetuity of ſucceſſion, we have already made inquiry, and found nothing ſimilar in the New Teſtament; let us now ſee if there is any thing in it peculiar to the ordination or public appointment of Chriſtian miniſters.

SECT. II.

OF THE PUBLIC DESIGNATION OF THE FIRST MINISTERS OF CHRISTIANITY.

IT may be proper to begin with obſerving the manner in which the divine Author of our religion veſted the firſt miniſters of his ſpiritual kingdom with their original commiſſion.—"And when he had called the twelve, he gave them power againſt unclean ſpirits, and to heal all manner of diſeaſes; ſaying, go and preach, the kingdom of God is at hand." Nothing can be more ſimple, and yet more grand;—more ſuited to the plainneſs, and, at the ſame time, the power of that religion they were to publiſh to the world. Though their work was extraordinary, they are qualified for it without pomp or ſhow, form or ceremony. It was intended, that the religion of Jeſus ſhould operate in ſpirit and in power, void of every oſtentatious exhibition that might gratify the ſenſes, and by which religion, in every former period, through its natural tendency to divert the mind from the immediate object of worſhip,

had been perverted; he, therefore, in his firſt commiſſion to his diſciples, gives a ſample of that amiable ſimplicity, and internal power by which it ſhould be diſtinguiſhed.—Juſt before his aſcenſion this commiſſion is renewed and enlarged: formerly it reſpected only the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael, now it extends to all nations: but the ſame ſimplicity is obſerved; no external rite, no ceremony, no ſolemn form. "And Jeſus ſpake unto them ſaying, all power is given unto you in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt; and lo I am alway with you, even unto the end of the world." This is the laſt commiſſion that Chriſt Jeſus left behind him, and which may be conſidered as a formal deſignation to the work of apoſtleſhip; and as it was accompanied with nothing external, if it be taken as wholly limited to the Apoſtles, neither doth it ſuppoſe or authoriſe any, if the commiſſion is conſidered as extending to every future miniſter of his religion.

"OUR Lord, it may be argued, while bodily preſent, had no occaſion to uſe any forms of admiſſion. He could authoritatively give the bleſſing and efficacy: beſides his church, was not yet formed into ſocieties under different ſpiritual teachers and directors ſubjected to general laws, and directed by a particular œconomy. It was after he was gone only that it became neceſſary to leave ſome tokens of that power with which he was pleaſed to veſt his miniſters; ſome external ſymbol with which the divine efficacy was immediately connected in the ſtated order of providence." True, our Lord had

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no occaſion to uſe any external forms, and yet we certainly know that he did, though indeed ſparingly, uſe them. He *laid his hands* on the ſick and healed them; and he made a ſalve of ſpittle and clay to anoint the eyes of one born blind, that he might receive his ſight, and by this means he did receive it. He uſed means that had no connection with the end, that he might ſhow his power in giving efficacy to them, as well as in producing no leſs extraordinary effects without them — And we may reaſonably conclude, that if the validity of the miniſterial function, and the efficacy of miniſterial acts ariſing from it, had, in the conſtitution of his ſpiritual kingdom, been ſuſpended on any external form of admiſſion, he would have uſed that form in appointing and impowering the firſt miniſters of his religion, as an authoriſed pattern and mode for all ſucceeding ones. Or, if after his departure only it became neceſſary to eſtabliſh ſome ſacred rite by which their admiſſion into the miniſterial office was, not only to be ſignified, but to be perpetuated and diſtinguiſhed by a peculiar efficacy accompanying it; would it not have been expreſſed in the body of the original commiſſion, or ſomewhere elſe in a plain and deciſive manner by the great head and founder of the chriſtian church? — Paſſing over this, however, and allowing every one to judge as he ſhall ſee more or leſs weight in it; we ſhall proceed to iuquire what is to be learned with certainty concerning this rite of laying on of hands from the Apoſtolic writings, what precedents they furniſh, and how far precedents eſtabliſh a law; whether it was peculiar to the miniſterial office, and appears to have been intended for perpetuity — or merely a temporary form.

SECT.

SECT. III.

WHAT PRECEDENTS THE APOSTOLIC WRITINGS FURNISH ON THIS SUBJECT.

THE zeal of the primitive chriſtians, together with the great authority which the Apoſtles had acquired, as might have been naturally expected, begot an unlimited confidence in them. "For they who believed ſold all that they had, and brought the money and laid it at their feet? To make the neceſſary and prudent application of ſuch great funds required no ſmall degree of honeſty, ſkill, and attention. It was a public truſt of great concern. The twelve were otherwiſe employed and moved in a higher ſphere. It was, therefore, by no means fit, that they "ſhould leave the miniſtry of the word and ſerve tables." How then was this buſineſs to be conducted ſo as to prevent all grounds of ſuſpicion, and render, at the ſame time, the public funds moſt beneficial? The moneys were the gift of the chriſtian ſociety, and they only had a juſt title to chuſe adminiſtrators. "Therefore they called the multitude of the diſciples unto them, and ſaid, Brethren, look ye out among you ſeven men of good report and full of the Holy Ghoſt and wiſdom, whom ye may appoint over this buſineſs; and the ſaying pleaſed the whole multitude and they choſe Stephen — whom they ſet before the Apoſtles, and they prayed and *laid their hands* upon them." This is the firſt time we read of impoſition of hands; and from this example we can fetch no precedent with regard

gard either to the miniſterial office, or the communication of extraordinary powers. For, in the *firſt* place, this was a diſtinguiſhed caſe: the common ſtock of the believers lay in the Apoſtle's hands, to the equal diſtribution of which they could not attend, amidſt their more important work; it became neceſſary, therefore, that men ſhould be choſen, and, to give them proper authority, ſolemnly ſet apart as truſtees for the public: and, however they might have employed afterwards whether in teaching or baptizing, it is evident that theſe were no part of their original appointment and inſtitution. *This* ſimply regarded the buſineſs of the poor. They were not ordained chriſtian miniſters but treaſurers of the public funds. *Secondly*, theſe public truſtees did not receive their qualification from their ordination, not one virtue of which they were not formerly poſſeſſed; but contrary-wiſe they were appointed to this work, as being men of honeſt report, full of the Holy Ghoſt, and of wiſdom. Their ordination, therefore, is to be conſidered only as a public and ſolemn declaration of their election. Nor doth it appear that the twelve ordained more, in this or any other capacity. Their general commiſſion included in it, no doubt, every meaſure neceſſary for the progreſs of Chriſtianity, and the edification of the churches. But what particular paſtors they appointed, or with regard to what churches, we are entirely in the dark. The ſacred writers furniſh us with nothing on this ſubject to gratify our curioſity. It ſeems to have been no part of their deſign to give an account of theſe matters. Their great view appears evidently to have been, from a few general inſtances to point out to us the manner in which primitive Chriſtianity was planted, the great

oppoſition

oppoſition it met with, and how far its influence extended; and to ſet an example before us of the zeal and fortitude, the unwearied labour and attention, the holineſs, humility, and contempt of the world, by which its firſt miniſters were ſo eminently diſtinguiſhed—as a leſſon of infinitely greater importance than the conſtitution of the moſt perfect hierarchy upon earth.

To thoſe who have received their ideas, and formed their opinions on this ſubject from converſation with Eccleſiaſtics or reading their books, it will hardly appear credible that the Scriptures ſhould be ſilent on this ſubject; and yet it is a fact indiſputably certain, that there is not one act of miniſterial ordination ſpecially mentioned in the hiſtory of the Apoſtles, or in all the Epiſtles—if we except the caſe of Barnabas and Paul, and who it is plain were not ordained by any of the Apoſtles, but by men who, at that time, held the ſame character and rank in the churches with themſelves. "Now, ſays the hiſtorian, there were in the church certain prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul, and as they miniſtred and faſted—the Holy Ghoſt ſaid, ſeparate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them—And they faſted and prayed and *laid their hands* upon them"—What were the peculiar qualifications or office of theſe prophets and teachers, it is not neceſſary nor perhaps eaſy to determine—it is ſufficient to obſerve here, that both were offices, in *order*, different from the Apoſtolic, and yet theſe teachers are authoriſed to ordain Barnabas and Saul, and to ſeparate them for the work of apoſtleſhip—Barnabas and Paul being thus commiſſioned, ſeem to have directed

directed their attention, in a particular manner, to ſupply the churches with fixed paſtors elders in every church; but what particular forms they uſed, except that their public appointment was accompanied with prayer, we are not informed. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, they commended them to the Lord"—We are left under the ſame uncertainty with regard to the form or order in which Titus proceeded in ordaining elders in every city of Crete; as we have nothing on record further on this ſubject but the end, or general purpoſe for which Paul left him in this iſland. "For this cauſe left I thee at Crete, that thou ſhouldeſt ordain elders in every city"—That the appointment of thoſe primitive miniſters of religion was accompanied by prayer and laying on of hands, is however, highly probable from the general admonition to Timothy; "Lay thy hands ſuddenly on no man," and again, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the pryſbetery:" and to the ſame purpoſe, "Stir up the gift that is in thee by the putting on of my hands."—From all theſe it may be allowed that laying on of hands was a rite commonly uſed in ordaining to the miniſterial office—but it ought *here* to be carefully obſerved that there is nothing in this that renders it a rite peculiar to miniſterial appointment—For it is affirmed, that extraordinary gifts were conferred *without* this rite, and that they were communicated *by* it, not merely to the firſt miniſters of religion, but to chriſtians in general. Now, if extraordinary and miraculous powers were not confined to it, if this rite was commonly

commonly uſed in conferring theſe extraordinary powers on chriſtians in general, I deſire to know in what reſpect it can poſſibly be conſidered as characteriſtic of the miniſterial office?

WHAT we have here affirmed, and which, we apprehend, will ſerve to throw very conſiderable light upon this queſtion, we ſhall now proceed to prove from the moſt deciſive evidence. *Firſt*, extraordinary gifts were communicated without impoſition of hands. "Then Peter ſaid unto them, repent and be baptized in the name of Chriſt Jeſus for the remiſſion of ſins, and ye ſhall receive the Holy Ghoſt—while Peter yet ſpake theſe words the Holy Ghoſt fell on all them that heard the word; and they who believed were aſtoniſhed for they heard them ſpeak with tongues, and magnify God." *Secondly*, extraordinary gifts were communicated to chriſtians in general by impoſition of hands. "Now when the Apoſtles had heard that Samaria had received the word God, they ſent unto them Peter and John, who when they were come prayed that they might receive the Holy Ghoſt, for as yet he had fallen upon none of them; only they believed on the Lord Jeſus, then laid they *their hands upon them*, and they received the Holy Ghoſt." Here it is plain that their believing in the Lord Jeſus is not conſidered as in itſelf ſufficient for all the ends of primitive Chriſtianity, without the falling of the Holy Ghoſt upon them—*as yet*, ſays the hiſtorian, plainly intimating that ſuch an event was common, and to be looked for under that extraordinary diſpenſation. Again, "And it came to paſs that Paul came to Epheſus, and finding certain diſciples he

ſaid

ſaid unto them, have ye received the Holy Ghoſt ſince ye believed?" This queſtion which the Apoſtle puts on the common faith of chriſtians, evidently ſuppoſes that believing and receiving the Holy Ghoſt, were generally at this period connected together. Being informed that they had been baptized only unto John's baptiſm, the Apoſtle takes occaſion from the teſtimony of this illuſtrious prophet to lead them to the knowledge of Jeſus, to whom John bore ſo honourable record. "When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jeſus, and when he had *laid his hands upon them*, the Holy Ghoſt came upon them, and they ſpake with tongues and prophecied."

THUS it appears with the utmoſt force of evidence, that the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghoſt were conferred without impoſition of hands, and that this rite was commonly uſed in conferring extraordinary powers on the primitive chriſtians in general; ſo that neither theſe gifts, nor laying on of hands, were peculiar to the miniſterial office.—Suppoſing, therefore, that by laying on of hands, whether of Barnabas or Saul, of Timothy or Titus, or the preſbytery, the Holy Ghoſt was conferred on the firſt miniſters of religion:—there is nothing peculiar in *this*, ſince others received the ſame gifts, and in the ſame manner, who are neither apoſtles, nor evangeliſts, nor elders, nor prophets, nor teachers. Suppoſing further, that all who were ordained to the miniſterial office, were ordained by impoſition of hands: neither is there any thing characteriſtic *here*; ſince it will admit of no doubt, that this was a form uſed in communicating gifts of the Holy Ghoſt on many other occaſions.

occaſions. We may, therefore, conclude, that there is not the leaſt evidence in all the apoſtolic writings, that ordination, as implying the communication of certain ſpiritual gifts by impoſition of hands, was a rite appropriated to the paſtoral office intended to render its miniſtrations valid, and to diſtinguiſh eccleſiaſtic officers from the body of chriſtians by certain inviſible powers.

SECT. IV.

OF THE CONTINUANCE OF THIS RITE IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

THE attentive and intelligent reader will immediately perceive, that, admitting impoſition of hands to have been a ſolemn rite, by which the firſt miniſters of chriſtianity were admitted to their office, there ſtill remains a queſtion of great importance on this ſubject; what evidence there is that this form of inveſtiture was deſigned to be continued in the chriſtian church? This is, certainly, a queſtion on which we have a right to be ſatisfied, and where the evidence, we apprehend, muſt ultimately reſt upon a clear proof of one of theſe following aſſertions:—That there is an expreſs law declaring, that this is no temporary rite:—That it appears from the circumſtances of the caſe, or from the nature of the rite itſelf, that it is of perpetual obligation, and to be obſerved in all times and places:—Or that the ſame, or ſimilar effects, have attended it in every future period, that were obſerved to accompany it during the apoſtolic age.

THAT there is no expreſs law declaring, that this is no

no temporary rite, but of perpetual obligation, the moſt zealous friends of the hierarchy muſt allow, and indeed muſt be ſelf-evident to every reader of the New Teſtament.—As to the circumſtances of the caſe, it hath been evidently ſhown, that they were peculiar and extraordinary; that as it was not uſed, ſo far as appears from the apoſtolic writers, in any common caſe, or by any ordinary perſon, neither was it limited to the ordination of miniſters. And, ſurely, there is nothing in the rite or external form itſelf, abſtractly conſidered, that hath the moſt diſtant relation to the miniſterial office, or any duty of it. It is a mere arbitrary form, and in its own nature of the ſame importance as waving your hand in the air, or putting it into your boſom. The importance of this rite, therefore, and the deſign of its continuance in the chriſtian church, muſt be determined in the *laſt* place, from the effects of it. If the ſame effects have been evidently perceived in every future age down from the apoſtolic, there can be no doubt —we have the cleareſt proof of the exiſtence of the ſame cauſe, while the ſign and the thing ſignified do accompany one another;—and here we are willing to reſt the deciſion. But eccleſiaſtics, it is to be feared, will beg to be excuſed: their pretenſions will not bear ſo equitable a trial. If prieſts have been occaſionally poſſeſſed of the knack of wonder-working, it muſt be confeſſed, they have been very ſparing of exhibitions of this ſort, where ſcience or knowledge had gained any ground;—and their wonders are now no more. The light hath at once expoſed, and baniſhed them from the greateſt part of Europe. The environs of the inquiſition, or the cells of monkiſh ſuperſtition, thoſe darkeſt abodes of

popery, may ſtill produce ſome memorable facts of this kind among its credulous and deluded votaries; but the *prieſthood* are become too wiſe to expoſe their cauſe to the ridicule of the world by pretenſions of this kind.

AT the ſame time it ought to be admitted as a thing highly probable, that the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghoſt were continued in the chriſtian church after the apoſtolic age, as circumſtances and occaſions required; as particular events, and the more or leſs ſettled ſtate of the chriſtian church, rendered the exertion of thoſe gifts neceſſary. But, perhaps, it is impoſſible to arrive at any certainty in this matter. A ſpirit of party and emulation ſo quickly aroſe, the marks of bigotry, credulity, and ſuperſtition ſo evidently diſcover themſelves, among writers of all denominations, in the ages even immediately ſucceeding the apoſtolic; but above all, an unhappy propenſity of ſubſtituting ingenuity, or human authority, upon the ruins of genuine chriſtianity, as render them altogether incompetent to judge, or give evidence in any one point, that might have tended to ſupport a favourite notion, to raiſe or ſink the credit of a party or a creed. But ſuppoſing that we could arrive at certainty, and fix with preciſion, how long the Holy Ghoſt was communicated by laying on of hands, inſtead of ſerving to prove, that this rite ought to be continued in the Chriſtian Church as a ſacred form of admiſſion to the miniſterial function, or to ſupport the cauſe of apoſtolic ſucceſſion, it would operate another way, and ſerve as an unanſwerable argument againſt both. It would ſhow, that Providence intended, that, along with theſe powers, the external ſign or form ſhould ceaſe by which

which they were communicated; and that in the ordinary courſe of things, the capital diſtinction of the miniſterial office ſhould ariſe from thoſe talents and qualifications moſt eminently adapted to public edification. And if the choice of public teachers came at any period to depend upon theſe, and by theſe alone they were fitted for their work, what ſhould render that rite and external ſign *neceſſary* which added nothing? Is it poſſible to give a ſatisfying account why it ſhould be conſidered as *eſſential* to the miniſterial office, when the thing ſignified by it is no more;—if it be not ſtill to impoſe upon the weak and ſuperſtitious ſome confuſed notions of divine communications?

THIS, it may be alledged, is an unfair concluſion;—and it may be argued, "that in the ceremony itſelf there is nothing which ſuggeſts the idea of extraordinary powers; and as ſome form of deſtination is neceſſary for aſcertaining the miniſterial office, this appears, not only innocent, but as ſuitable as any other.—When people are tinctured with ſuperſtition, any ceremony whatever, a touch of the hand, a word may be ſuppoſed to convey ſupernatural powers. Thus the words, "this is my body," pronounced by the prieſt, are ſuppoſed by all preſent to produce the moſt miraculous metamorphoſis that can be conceived; and yet the ſame words ſpoken by a miniſter in a proteſtant congregation, no one imagines to be attended with the ſame effect: nor would a perſon argue juſtly who ſhould inſiſt, that proteſtants ſhould lay them aſide for fear of introducing the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation: and is not the argument againſt laying on of hands the ſame?"

IN return to this I have ſeveral things to offer, which, it is hoped, will in ſome meaſure deſerve the reader's attention, and ſerve, ſtill further, to elucidate this point.

IN the *firſt* place, this objection goes entirely upon a miſtake of the author's argument. He is not reaſoning againſt *this* or *that* form of deſignation to the miniſterial function. He admits, that all forms, as ſuch, are equally innocent, and that ſome may be in their nature, or by cuſtom, more ſuitable than others; and if there are any who think the form in queſtion of this denomination, he is by no means diſpoſed to differ from them. His reaſoning is entirely levelled againſt this form as *neceſſary* and *eſſential* it itſelf; as neceſſary to conſtitute the miniſterial character, as eſſential to the validity of miniſterial acts; and, in this view, the whole of his argument points againſt the connection between laying on of hands, and certain ſpiritual powers, ſuppoſed to be communicated by this external rite. Diſſolve *this* connection, in which the whole faſcination of prieſtcraft lies; and he acknowledges, that impoſition of hands is a very innocent ceremony.

HE begs it may be obſerved, in the *ſecond* place, that though it is true that, among people deeply tinctured with ſuperſtition, any ceremony whatever may be ſuppoſed to be connected with extraordinary powers—were it, "the driving of a nail into a door;" the queſtion is how they come to be tinctured with this ſuperſtition which ſo eaſily connects ends and means that have no relation to one another? Is it not by a falſe aſſociation of ideas formed into a habit? And is not *this* owing

to

to the early impreſſion of certain eccleſiaſtic tenets, not only indiſputable, but which it would be impious to oppoſe? Why doth a popiſh congregation believe that, by pronouncing theſe words "this is my body," ſo miraculous a metamorphoſis is produced—and why do the ſame words pronounced in a proteſtant one carry in them no ſuch conviction? It is evidently becauſe the one from their infancy have been taught to believe ſo, and would think it criminal for one moment to entertain a doubt of it; and becauſe the other have been warned againſt the deluſion, and have been taught to believe otherwiſe.—And were proteſtant miniſters of every denomination, as willing to ſpeak out plainly, and at the ſame pains to tell their people that there is no connection, in the ordinary courſe of Providence, between ordination by laying on of hands, and the communication of any powers but what were formerly beſtowed by nature, grace, or education, the people would be in as little danger of miſtaking in the *latter* as in the *former* caſe—That, at preſent, they labour under no ſmall deluſion, is evident from the ſuperſtitious notions that, almoſt univerſally, prevail even in proteſtant communities. Among many inſtances that might be produced, the value they put upon the prayers of a miniſter upon a death-bed, though they can neither attend to what is ſaid, nor ſeem to have had any former impreſſions of religion, and the dreadful apprehenſions they entertain leaſt their little ones ſhould die without baptiſm, are indiſputable proofs. Are theſe rational convictions, or are they agreeable to any declarations in the ſacred writings? can rational or ſcriptural religion be founded upon them? And, yet, it can admit of no doubt that

theſe, and every other ſuperſtitious notion almoſt, derive their origin from falſe ideas of eccleſiaſtic powers.—And is it any matter of wonder, when upon inquiry it will be found, that the greater number of proteſtant miniſters, inſtead of rectifying their miſtakes on this ſubject, ſtrenuouſly maintain an indiſſoluble connection between laying on of hands—of the biſhop, or preſbytery, on ſome order that they hold to be of Apoſtolic inſtitution, and the validity of the miniſterial office; and this, not merely in point of decency and external order, but a divine inſtitute? of what avail then is it that the ceremony is innocent in itſelf, and implies nothing that can convey the idea of extraordinary powers?—Things antecedently indifferent when abuſed as the means of ſuperſtition, and miſleading the mind by falſe ideas, loſe their nature and become real evils. And in particular if any rite or external ſymbol hath been accompanied with an extraordinary virtue or efficacy by the divine appointment, but which is evidently withdrawn in the order of Providecce; if it ſhall ſtill remain the object of veneration and undue regard, and prove the means of miſleading the mind of the weak and credulous in matters of high importance, it ought, ſurely, on that account to be aboliſhed. "He did that which was right in the ſight of the Lord—he removed the high places, brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen ſerpent which Moſes had made, for unto thoſe days the children of Iſrael did burn incenſe unto it."

As a further proof that proteſtant churches entertain certain miſapprehenſions on this ſubject,—whatever may be

be the opinion of individuals, who neither conſider it as a ground of ſeparation, nor are poſſeſſed of influence ſufficient to rectify the error—the diſtinction made between a licence to preach the Goſpel, and a power to adminiſter the ſacraments, ought not to be omitted. From whence it is aſked doth this diſtinction ariſe, and from what cauſe is it juſtified, if there be no powers ſuppoſed to be conveyed by laying on of hands, which the perſon ordained was not poſſeſſed of before,—if no virtue be derived from this ceremony which gives to theſe ſacred inſtitutions their peculiar efficacy—or at leaſt an efficacy which they could not poſſibly have had, if diſpenſed by a mere licenciate? Can ſuch a diſtinction fail to miſlead the people, and to create thoſe ſuperſtitious notions which we have mentioned? Is it not an *inexhauſtible* ſource of ſuperſtition, if Eccleſiaſtics are diſpoſed to avail themſelves of it? and doth it not indicate ſome capital miſtake in proteſtant miniſters, both with regard to this admiſſary rite, and thoſe inſtitutions of Chriſtians?—If theſe queſtions can admit of a rational and ſatisfying reply, without juſtifying the attempt that hath been made, to ſeparate between this rite, and thoſe falſe or artificial ideas, that ignorance or policy have appended to it, ſome labour and attention have been beſtowed in vain.

CHAP. VII.

OF SACRAMENTS.

SECT. I.

OF THE IMPORT OF THIS WORD, AND THE PARTICULAR IDEA TO WHICH THE REASONING IN THE SEQUEL IS CONFINED.

IT will appear to the judicious reader, that the manner of reaſoning which hath been adopted in the three foregoing chapters is of that ſort, that the former argument ſeems to ſuperſede the latter, and yet, upon more attentive examination, will be found to receive additional ſtrength and confirmation from it.—Thus, if the account we have given of the Church of Chriſt is agreeable to the ſcriptural idea of it; if the rights of Chriſtianity belong to Chriſtians in general, and to every Chriſtian ſociety in particular met in the name and agreeably to the laws and doctrines of Chriſt, there can be no order or ſucceſſion of Eccleſiaſtics poſſeſſed of excluſive powers. And, if it appear upon inquiry, that ſuch a ſucceſſion of Eccleſiaſtics, and ſuch paramount powers are no where ſupported by the ſacred record, we have additional evidence and confirmation that the whole privileges of Chriſtianity belong to the Churches. Again, if there is no uninterrupted ſucceſſion of Chriſtian Miniſters deſcending in a particular order, and fixed by a particular

ticular law, there can be no eſtabliſhed rite for perpetuating this ſucceſſion, nor any communications peculiar to it ariſing from the obſervance of this rite, and preſerving this tranſmiſſion; and, if it admit of a clear and poſitive proof that no ſuch rite was ever inſtituted, as a rite peculiar to the deſignation of the miniſterial office, nor any external form of admiſſion to that function neceſſary to give validity to certain miniſterial acts, it follows that an unbroken and uninterrupted ſucceſſion of Chriſtian Miniſters cannot in itſelf be eſſential, becauſe there is no authoriſed form of deſignation, nor any particular inſtitute by which it is to be carried forward, and aſcertained. — In like manner, if this rite, that is, ordination by laying on of hands, is no eſtabliſhed form of deſignation to the miniſterial office, nor authoriſed by any divine law; if thereby not one gift, not one virtue is communicated, which the perſon ordained did not poſſeſs before; if it imply no more than a publick and formal deſtination to the office, which external order and decency may require; we may reſt upon it as a fair and natural concluſion that the poſitive inſtitutions of Chriſtianity, called ſacraments, with regard to their validity and internal operation, are utterly independent of it.

WE ſhall, nevertheleſs, proceed in the ſame manner with regard to the point before us — following thus the chain, link by link, which eccleſiaſtics have pretended to hang out to us, and to faſten upon it our eternal hopes; and ſhall inquire into the nature and efficacy of the ſacraments, and to whom the diſpenſation of them belongs. And if, in our reaſoning upon this article,

ticle, we ſhall appear to be more prolix than in the former chapters, we muſt beg the reader's excuſe; as the wonderful virtues ſaid to belong to theſe religious inſtitutions, with the excluſive right of adminiſtration wholly aſſumed to themſelves, is the mighty charm by which *prieſts* of every denomination have faſcinated the minds of their deluded votaries, and gained an unlimited aſcendance over their conſciences. And we ſhall begin with endeavouring to fix the import of this word, and with what propriety it is uſed.

IN its ordinary ſignification it ſeems to be derived from the Latin word ſacramentum, which by the Romans was applied in a particular manner to the oath which ſoldiers took to be faithful to their general: and hence it hath been adopted by Chriſtian Divines for Baptiſm and the Lord's Supper, which are ſuppoſed to be oaths *de fideli*; and, therefore, are known by the general name of the *Sacraments*, i. e. in other words, oaths of allegiance, ſubmiſſion, and fidelity.—But in a more general ſenſe, the word imports whatever, in ſacred things, is ſuppoſed to be deep and myſterious; and thus the vulgate frequently renders the Greek word μυστηριον by *ſacramentum*; and the Church of Rome, in conformity to this idea, have encreaſed the number of their Sacraments to ſeven.—But there is ſtill ſomething more peculiar in the notion of Sacraments, and wherein the *eſſence* of them is ſuppoſed to conſiſt; and that is the conveyance of certain ſpiritual virtues and bleſſings by the external uſe and application of ſome viſible ſign or ſymbol of divine inſtitution.—Thus baptiſm is ſaid to be "a ſign of regeneration, whereby, as by an inſtrument, they

they who receive baptiſm rightly, are grafted into the church:—the promiſe of the forgiveneſs of ſins, and our adoption to be the ſons of God, by the Holy Ghoſt, are viſibly ſigned and ſealed.—That by the baptiſm of Jeſus Chriſt in Jordan, the water was ſanctified to the *myſtical* waſhing away of ſin." And ſtill more explicitly:—"That baptiſm actually produces its whole effect in waſhing away original ſin, and bringing the grace of ſanctification into the ſoul, independent, even, of any poſitive diſpoſition on the part of the receiver." The ſame or ſimilar virtues are aſcribed to the inſtitution of our Lord's Supper from the ſame notion of its being a Sacrament, "the outward ſymbols of bread and wine are ſeals to every believer of all the benefits purchaſed by Chriſt."—Chriſt is given in this holy Sacrament for our ſpiritual food and ſuſtenance, ſo that if by a lively faith we receive it, then we ſpiritually eat his fleſh and drink his blood, we are one with Chriſt, and Chriſt with us."—Theſe, ſo far as we have been to learn, are the common and received ideas which this word is ſuppoſed to imply; and as to the propriety of it to expreſs thoſe ideas, ſo far as it is underſtood, we have no intention to diſpute; though, it is humbly ſuggeſted, that it would be more diſcreet to talk of Scripture inſtitutions in Scripture language: we ſhall, therefore, make uſe of it, as we may have occaſion, confining ourſelves to thoſe inſtitutions called by this name among proteſtants, and to that notion alone which ſuppoſes that the Sacraments, in virtue of external ſigns, are accompanied with thoſe efficacious and extraordinary virtues.—Bleſſings ſo great, ſuſpended on means ſeemingly ſo inadequate, become ſuſpicious in the moral order of Providence, awaken our curioſity,

curioſity, and claim our ſtricteſt ſcrutiny; leaſt we impoſe upon ourſelves or our fellow-men in matters of ſuch infinite concern. This ſhall be the ſubject, therefore, of ſome following ſections.

SECT. II.

OF THE EFFICACY ATTENDING BAPTISM.

THE firſt queſtion undoubtedly is, what is the doctrine of the New Teſtament on this ſubject? Is there any thing to be found here that can lead us to the idea of regeneration, and the waſhing away of original ſin; or bringing the grace of juſtification into the ſoul, by the mere application of the rite appropriated to baptiſm, independent of any diſpoſition of the receiver? To be able to give a ſatisfactory anſwer to this queſtion, we ſhall inquire, *firſt*, if there is any law or mandate relative to this point; and, *ſecondly*, if there are any precedents that can throw light upon it.

As to the *firſt*, it is wiſely ordered, that we have an expreſs law or mandate to which we can appeal, and from attending to which we ſhall be enabled to judge with certainty; and if from thence it can be made appear by the rules of fair reaſoning, or any mode of interpretation hitherto adopted, that there is any foundation for the Eccleſiaſtic tenet, that baptiſm waſhes away origina ſin, or produces its whole effect of bringing the grace of juſtification unto the ſoul independent of any poſitive diſpenſation on the part of the receiver; we are willing to give up

up the whole controverſy. The mandate then runs thus. "Go ye and *teach* all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt, and lo I am with even you unto the end of the world." This is the only mandate on record—now let any one of common ſenſe, and common integrity, ſay, if there be any thing expreſſed here, or that can be inferred from any word in the whole commiſſion, that hath the moſt diſtant relation to infants, or original ſin? The commiſſion evidently connects *teaching* and *baptizing*, and makes the *one* the condition or foundation of the other—The Apoſtles were, by and by, to be ſent forth to proſylete the nations, a moſt perilous and arduous work, where, to fleſh and blood, inſurmountable difficulties lay in the way, and which, therefore, required extraordinary powers and ſupports. Well, how were they to proceed? They were ſimply to preach the Goſpel, aud leave the effects to the divine bleſſing which was promiſed to attend them. Was any any form of admiſſion into the chriſtian church neceſſary? Whoever ſhould believe the divine report they are commanded to baptize—an external rite of admiſſion not peculiar to Chriſtianity, not inſtituted but adopted by our Lord. "All Iſrael were baptized unto Moſes in the cloud." The Jews received all their proſelytes by baptiſm; and John baptized at Jordan, where Jeſus himſelf, that he might fulfil all righteouſneſs, was baptized himſelf in common with others. He therefore continues the ſame rite, and gives a new ſanction to it, by eſtabliſhing it as an external form of admiſſion into the chriſtian community—at once repreſentative of the chriſtian's profeſſion, and figurative of his hopes; of the *firſt* by its purity; of the *laſt* by his being, as it were, burying and riſing

riſing again. This is the very account that an Apoſtle gives of it, " being buried with Chriſt in baptiſm, and riſing again with him through faith of the operation of God, who hath raiſe him again from the dead." Add to this that admiſſion to the privileges and hopes of the Goſpel, in thoſe ſacred names of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, by which the Deity was exhibited in a new and ſupernatural, and, at the ſame time, the moſt amiable character, could not fail to leave deep impreſſions on the minds of novitiates. This is a natural and juſt account of this rite, and its being eſtabliſhed as a form of chriſtian admiſſion. It is a rite that, in no ſtage, or former period of its application, was ſuppoſed to be attended with remiſſion of ſin, or any extraordinary virtues. John " baptized in the wilderneſs and preached the baptiſm of repentance for the remiſſion of ſins;" and why ſhould we imagine that any new efficacy was appended to it, when there is not one hint in the commiſſion that can poſſibly lead us to ſuch an idea? He who pretends to indulge his own fancy, where the thing in queſtion is a matter of pure revelation, opens a door for vain and preſumptuous conjectures without end, and without a poſſibility of arriving at certainty of any kind —Where revelation is deciſive, it is our duty to ſubmit. " Every thought, and every thing that exalteth itſelf againſt the knowledge of God, ought to be brought into captivity unto the obedience of Chriſt." But why will men frame myſteries for themſelves, and endeavour to impoſe them upon others?—A doctrine ſeemingly ſo abſurd as the waſhing away of ſin, independent of every intellectual and moral act, and which would reduce religion to a mere machinery; a doctrine ſo inconſiſtent with

with the nature of man, and the whole plan of God's moral government, would, ſurely, require to be ſupported by the moſt convincing and deciſive evidence. I ſay inconſiſtent with the whole plan of God's moral government—for we may defy all the abettors of this tenet to produce any thing ſimilar to it, ſo far as we are acquainted with that plan, and the manner of its procedure. In the natural government of the world, effects may be produced, and we have repeated inſtances in the divine record of their having been produced, independently of any diſpoſition of the agent, and where there appears no connection between them, and the ſign or immediate condition: thus was the leproſy of the Syrian cured, and thus were all the miracles wrought by Moſes in Egypt produced: and in the ſame manner muſt every miracle performed by ſecondary agents be produced. They muſt depend upon the connection eſtabliſhed by Infinite Power and Wiſdom between the ſign and the thing ſignified. It will be further acknowledged, that the Supreme Lord himſelf may, by a ſovereign act of his grace, pardon ſin, but in no inſtance does he it without working repentance and a change of diſpoſition. It ſhall even be admitted here, for the ſake of argument, that he may depute this power to thoſe immediately commiſſioned by him, and directed by his unerring ſpirit—But he hath eſtabliſhed, in the order of his moral government, no formal rite to which the pardon or waſhing away of ſin is appended, independent of the diſpoſition of the receiver. Here the end and the means are ſtrictly connected together, and operate, not mechanically, but morally. The doctrine therefore of baptiſm

tiſm waſhing away original ſin, is equally unſcriptural and abſurd.

LET us now inquire, in the *ſecond* place, if there are any precedents in the ſacred writings that throw light upon this point. The nature and extent of a law is beſt known from its general application to the particular ſubject which it regards. If the original mandate given to the Apoſtles, therefore, included in it moral ablution, we may certainly look for examples, as ſo many facts that illuſtrate and confirm this explication, as there is evidently nothing in the body of the mandate itſelf that leads to it — as its plain and natural import leads to a contrary concluſion. Is there any ſuch particular application of this mandate? Are there any ſuch examples to be found in the hiſtory of the Apoſtles, or the Apoſtolic writings? Not one. We read, indeed, that Lydia, when ſhe believed, was baptized and her houſhold; and that the jailor, upon his converſion, was baptized and his houſe: but who dare reſt a particular concluſion ſufficient to eſtabliſh a doctrine of ſo intereſting and extraordinary a nature, upon this generality? Who dare affirm that there were infants in either of thoſe houſes? Or ſuppoſing there had been, and that they were baptized, is there one thing concerning the efficacy of the external rite in waſhing away original ſin, or producing its whole effect of bringing the grace of juſtification into the ſoul, independent of any diſpoſition of the receiver? The contrary appears with ſufficient evidence — When the jailor put the queſtion, "Sirs, what ſhall I do to be ſaved?" the anſwer is, "Believe on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and thou ſhalt be ſaved and *thy houſe*." Was the

the houſe to be ſaved through the jailors faith? no ſuch thing. Was it to be ſaved by being baptized? equally diſtant from the truth. How then were they to be ſaved? In the ſame manner, and by the ſame means that the jailor himſelf was — by believing. "When he brought them into his houſe he rejoiced *believing* in the Lord with *all his houſe*." Thus were they ſaved, and, if infants are capable of believing, we ſhall allow that, if there were any in the houſe, they were ſaved likewiſe. In like manner, we may conclude, was the houſhold of Lydia baptized—"believing and rejoicing in the Lord."

THE order of primitive Chriſtianity, beyond all doubt, was—believe and be baptized, nor is it poſſible for Eccleſiaſtics to produce one text to the contrary. "And the eunuch ſaid, here is water, what ſhould hinder me from being baptized, and Philip ſaid, if thou believeſt with thine heart thou mayeſt; and he anſwered and ſaid, I believe that Chriſt is the Son of God, and they both went down into the water, and he baptized him." —Beſides this one, there are ten examples of baptiſm on record in every one of which, believing, repenting, or the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghoſt expreſsly precede this external rite of admiſſion (ſee Acts 2, 38. 8, 12. 8, 13. 9, 18. 10, 47. 16, 15. 16, 35. 18, 8. in this verſe are two inſtances 19, 5.)—The only caſe that may be thought an exception is that of the Apoſtle Paul, Acts, 9, 18; but whoever will attend impartially to the whole of it muſt be convinced that prior to his baptiſm he was a real convert. His conviction and the change of his diſpoſition appear two ways. Senſible that the voice which addreſſed him, was

the voice of power and majeſty, he aſks, aſtoniſhed and trembling, "who art thou Lord?" Being fully ſatisfied from the anſwers that it was Jeſus, whom he perſecuted in his church and people, he immediately puts the queſtion "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He is all ſubmiſſion and willing to be employed at his command. In the next place, having arrived at Damaſcus, he faſts and prays; and to whom and in what view his prayers were addreſſed the narrative will leave us no room to doubt—Beſides all this, it ſeems evident that he had likewiſe received the Holy Ghoſt before his baptiſm. "And putting his hands on him, Ananias ſaid, brother Saul, the Lord, even Jeſus who appeared unto thee in the way as thou cameſt, hath ſent me that thou mighteſt receive thy ſight, and be filled with the Holy Ghoſt"—Here we may obſerve that Ananias firſt addreſſes Saul as a brother which evidently implies the ſame common faith, nor is this appellation ever applied otherwiſe; and then he lays his hands upon him, the ordinary ſign of divine communications—ſaying, "Jeſus hath ſent me that thou mighteſt receive thy ſight, and be filled with the Holy Ghoſt, and immediately he received his ſight." Now can one believe that one part of his commiſſion was fulfilled, and the other not? — that Saul received his ſight by the hands of Ananias, but not the Holy Ghoſt? we cannot, without doing violence to every rule of connection and propriety by which words can be explained. But doth not the ſame ſacred hiſtorian, when he repreſents the Apoſtle Paul himſelf giving an account of his own converſion before the chief captain at Jeruſalem, beſt explain his own meaning? And is not the neceſſity of baptiſm for waſhing away ſin there plainly

plainly implied? "And now why tarrieſt thou? Ariſe and be baptized and waſh away thy ſins"—As this is a text, which by ſome is judged deciſive in aſcertaining the efficacy of baptiſm in waſhing away ſin, it cannot be diſagreeable to the reader, who deſires to arrive at the knowledge of the truth, to know what ſupport it gives to this doctrine.

And in the *firſt* place, it is allowed that the divine hiſtorian is the beſt interpreter of his own meaning: but in return we would aſk, is the meaning of a writer beſt explained by one paſſage, or a dozen, all relating to the ſame ſubject? Is there any that has the ſober uſe of his underſtanding that would in a queſtion of any doubt, and where the ſenſe was expreſſed with equal plainneſs and perſpicuity, explain *eleven* places by *one*, rather than *one* by *eleven*? and yet this is exactly the ſtate of the caſe with thoſe who would inſiſt upon this ſingle paſſage as a proof that waſhing away of ſin follows upon baptiſm. In all the texts immediately referred to, the hiſtorian deſcribes the perſons baptized as believers and converts. The evangeliſt declares that he only who *believes*, and is baptized ſhall be ſaved. And the ſame hiſtorian who puts the words in diſpute into the Apoſtle's mouth, evidently deſcribes him before his baptiſm a convert, a choſen veſſel of God to bear his name before his Gentiles: and yet in oppoſition to all this evidence, more full perhaps than for any other article in the chriſtian creed, they would deduce this tenet from one ſingle expreſſion. Nothing can be more abſurd. Nothing can exhibit a clearer proof of prejudice and bigotry, or perhaps ſomething worſe.

WHAT then would you make of the words "be baptized and waſh away thy ſins?" I would certainly explain them in analogy to the whole tenor of Scripture on this ſubject. Neither in this view is the explication forced. Faith and baptiſm were inſeparably connected in the plan of primitive chriſtianity; the *laſt*, not as an inſtrument of pardon in itſelf, but as it was a proper expreſſion and evidence of the *firſt*. Surrounded as the firſt chriſtians were with enemies on all hands, a public profeſſion confirmed by ſome external rite appears highly neceſſary: and what rite, as hath been ſhown, could be more ſuitable or expreſſive? Baptiſm, being thus the external ſign of that faith to which the pardon of ſin is ſo expreſsly and repeatedly promiſed, that it may be juſtly called the firſt and capital doctrine of Chriſtianity, might, in a more general or ſecondary view without great impropriety, be in itſelf conſidered as the ſign of this pardon of waſhing away of ſin. Surely, there is nothing in all this contrary to the common and well underſtood forms of ſpeech. But to bring the queſtion with thoſe, who ſtruggle ſo hard for this text as deciſive with regard to the efficacy of baptiſm, into a ſtill narrower point of view. Let me aſk if the caſe of Saul can have any relation to the baptiſm of infants, or original ſin, without ſuppoſing that his original ſin was waſhed away, and that his actual ſins were left unpardoned? It ſurely cannot, and this is a ſuppoſition that cannot be admitted, becauſe the text is evidently general and makes no ſuch diſtinction "ariſe and be baptized, and waſh away thy ſins." Now how could his ſins be waſhed away, while he ſtill remained under the power of the more heinous and aggravated guilt

guilt—the guilt of actual ſins?—If it ſhould be ſaid that both original and actual ſins were waſhed away, that baptiſm is ſufficient for both theſe ends, and this without any poſitive diſpoſition on the part of the receiver: why then, I would further aſk, are not adults baptized, ſeeing the effects of this rite are evidently, according to this doctrine, more extenſive with regard to them than with regard to infants? For, if Saul's ſins were waſhed away by the mere application of the external rite, why may not the guilt of any other ſinner be waſhed away, in the ſame manner, were he grown old and hoary headed in ſin? Why not on a death bed? And this, I confeſs, next to extreme unction, or a plenary pardon from the holy ſee, would be the ſhorteſt and eaſieſt expedient of getting to heaven, that the *prieſthood* hath yet diſcovered.

WE may, therefore, upon the whole, conclude, that nothing appears from the examples or precedents in Scripture to ſupport the tenet,—whether of papiſts or proteſtants, that baptiſm waſhes away original guilt, and by the mere uſe of the external rite brings the grace of juſtification into the ſoul. I think we may ſay, without preſuming too much, that the contrary appears with the moſt convincing evidence:—which is ſtill further confirmed from the account the Apoſtle Peter gives of this rite, and in what manner it ſaves,—not by outward waſhing, but inward purity.—Let us attend to the whole paſſage, that the reader may be fully ſatisfied of its real meaning and import: "The like figure whereunto (the ark) even baptiſm doth now alſo ſave us, not the putting away the filth of the fleſh, but the anſwer

of a good conſcience, by the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt." Now, wherein lies the propriety and force of this ſimilitude, if it be not in Noah's faith as deſcribed by another Apoſtle: "by faith Noah being warned of God, prepared an ark for the ſaving of his houſe, by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteouſneſs which is by faith." The long period in building the ark was a trial of his faith, in the threatenings denounced againſt a wicked world, and in the deliverance promiſed to him and his family; and, at once, by his ſtability and perſeverance a confirmation of it. By means of his faith, therefore, he was ſaved. For if he had begun to doubt, and had thereby been diſcouraged from his work, there had been no ark to ſave him. Unto this, ſays the Apoſtle, baptiſm is a like figure, as it is a public profeſſion of our faith in all the promiſes and threatenings of the Goſpel,—in all the bleſſings of it; in the great deliverance and ſalvation exhibited in that covenant which was confirmed by the reſurrection of Chriſt. But as Noah, not only diſcovered his faith by building the ark, but evidenced the moral effects of it by being a preacher of righteouſneſs, not ceaſing to warn and admoniſh a corrupt and inſenſible generation, and doing according to all that the Lord commanded him. In like manner we muſt act conſiſtently with the profeſſion we have made in baptiſm;—not ſatisfying ourſelves with waſhing away the filth of the fleſh, but having a good conſcience correſponding to our faith.—It was not the mere building of the ark that ſaved Noah, it was his faith and his righteouſneſs. It is not the mere waſhing with water that ſaves in baptiſm; it is faith and the anſwer of a good conſcience. Thus we

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ſee that every text ſtrengthens the reſt, and leads to the ſame concluſion;—that baptiſm is the public profeſſion of that faith, by the uſe of an external inſtituted rite, and accompanied with a ſuitable life and converſation, which ſaves.

THERE is one thing further on this article, which I would beg the reader's indulgence juſt to touch upon. It is the analogy between circumciſion and baptiſm. It doth not occur to me indeed, that the Scriptures any where ſtate a parallel between them, or deduce any concluſion from the one to illuſtrate the other: but, as divines have taken a conceit, that baptiſm under the Goſpel comes in the place of circumciſion under the law, and ſpeak much of the laſt as the ſeal of the old, and ſtill more of the firſt as the ſeal of the new covenant, in a manner frequently not eaſily to be underſtood, but which, upon the whole, ſeems deſigned to magnify the efficacy of baptiſm; we may ſhortly inquire from whence this notion of a ſeal hath ariſen, and what it imports when applied to both.

THERE appears to me only one paſſage in the New Teſtament that ſeems to give the moſt diſtant countenance to this form of expreſſion; "and he received the ſign of circumciſion, a ſeal of the righteouſneſs of the faith which he had, being yet uncircumciſed, that he might be the Father of all them that believe, though they be not circumciſed, that righteouſneſs might be imputed unto them alſo." Now, in order to underſtand the real import of this, let it be obſerved, that the Jews, from the zealous, and almoſt unſurmountable attach-

ment to this rite, conſidered it as conferring on them a ſole and excluſive right to the divine favour, and could not think of embracing a religion that diſſolved ſo ſacred a bond. Hence aroſe all their diſputes about receiving the Gentile converts.—To obviate this grand objection, rectify their miſtake, and reconcile their minds to the faith of the Goſpel, as utterly independent of it, the Apoſtle employs almoſt a whole epiſtle; and here he traces this rite back to its origin, and ſhows them, that Abraham's being the peculiar favourite of heaven was by no means the effect of his circumciſion, but that circumciſion itſelf was the ſeal of the righteouſneſs of *that* faith, by which, and not by this rite, he ſtood forth the Father of all them that believe; to whom, in like manner, righteouſneſs would be imputed,—by thus walking in the ſteps of Abraham.—What then are we to underſtand by this faith of Abraham, which was thus ſealed by circumciſion? What this faith was, we ſo far learn from the ſame Apoſtle, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place, which he ſhould afterwards receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went." But we have reaſon to think, that there is more included in this faith, which was the ſeal of his righteouſneſs: becauſe the promiſe made to him, that he ſhould become a great nation, and that all the families of the earth ſhould be bleſſed in him, was another proof of Abraham's faith, previous to his receiving the ſign of circumciſion.—For God's firſt appearance and call to him, "Get thee out of thy own country," was in Meſopotamia, and the promiſe was made to him after his removal from thence, when he dwelt in Charran, or Haram (ſee Acts, chapter

ter VII. verſe 2, 3, 4, compared with Gen. chapter 11. verſe 31.) The righteouſneſs imputed to Abraham appeared, therefore, in his faith in both caſes;—in the firſt by an unlimited ſubmiſſion, and ready obedience to the divine will;—in the laſt, by an unſhaken perſuaſion in the divine veracity and faithfulneſs, as well as in his power to accompliſh what he had promiſed:—theſe were expreſſive of a temper, and conſtituted a character of the higheſt moral rectitude. Now, ſays the Apoſtle, circumciſion was the ſeal of this faith. It was intended as a permanent teſtimony of it, and a viſible ſecurity for the fulfillment of the divine promiſe.—The concluſion muſt have been obvious to every intelligent Chriſtian to whom he addreſſed himſelf: the promiſe having been faithfully accompliſhed, that there was no further occaſion for the ſecurity. This, it is hoped, will be allowed to be a candid and juſt account of circumciſion as a ſeal of the righteouſneſs of faith.—And if baptiſm bears any analogy to this rite, it lies in this, that it is a public evidence of our faith and profeſſion, a public confirmation of all the gracious promiſes in the Goſpel, and a viſible ſecurity, that they ſhall be certainly fulfilled to all them that believe.

THIS rite had a further proſpect, which by no means lay in the Apoſtle's way to illuſtrate, and which we may juſt mention. It was the ſign of a temporal covenant with the children of Iſrael, deſigned to preſerve their community entire, until the promiſed ſeed ſhould come, and the promiſes and prophecies concerning this extraordinary perſonage ſhould appear exactly accompliſhed. Without this rite, therefore, there was no admiſſion as a mem-

a member of their common-wealth, nor any claim to the diſtinguiſhed advantages to be reaped under a polity where God himſelf appeared intereſted by the moſt ſignal interpoſitions of his Providence :—Accordingly it was a rite that could reſpect *males* only. Theſe were the proper repreſentatives of the community, and therefore the ſign or token, under *this reſtriction*, was a ſufficient claim, ſo long as they continued obedient, to the bleſſings promiſed. Hence every uncircumciſed *male* child was to be cut off from the people, that the repreſentation might be compleat, and fully anſwer the terms of the covenant. Hence likewiſe the poſterity of the Patriarch were particularly diſtinguiſhed, ſo that it ſhould not be in their power to incorporate with the nations without a known deſertion of their religion and people.

SECT. III.

WHETHER INFANTS ARE CHARGEABLE WITH GUILT.

HITHERTO we have delivered our own ſentiments; but, in the queſtion now before us, dare not pronounce a poſitive deciſion. As writers of great candour, capacity, and learning, however, have preſumed to put an expreſs negative upon it; and as their opinion, if not contradicted by ſcripture, which alone can give us any information on this point, would pull out the very foundation ſtone upon which the efficacy of baptiſm in waſhing away original ſin, wholly reſts — it would be doing injuſtice to the ſubject, not to lay before the impartial reader the outlines of what they have advanced

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on this ſubject, leaving it to have what weight it appears to deſerve.

THOSE who maintain the affirmative, inſiſt on two texts of ſcripture, among others, which they hold deciſive: "Among whom alſo *we all* had our converſation in times paſt in the *luſts* of our fleſh, fulfilling the deſires of the *fleſh* and of the *mind*, and were by nature children of *wrath*, even as others — but God who is rich in mercy — hath quickened us together in Chriſt Jeſus." Now from this it is argued, that by *nature* here the Apoſtle means to expreſs the ſtate in which all men are born, and conſequently that all men are born under the wrath of God; and as the divine wrath is properly the exerciſe of his juſtice in the puniſhment of ſin — that all men are born ſinners. In anſwer to this, thoſe who oppoſe the doctrine maintain, that there is no occaſion for taking the word *nature* in this limited view, as it is evidently uſed by the ſame Apoſtle — not for the ſtate in which one is born, but for cuſtom, diſpoſition, habit. "Doth not even *nature* itſelf teach you, that if a man have long hair it is a ſhame to him?" Doth not the cuſtom or practice of the country teach you that this is a thing indecent? They ſay further, that taking the Apoſtle's words in connection, and as one part ſerves to explain another, it is plain that by nature he means habit, or an acquired diſpoſition; becauſe he ſpeaks of himſelf and the Epheſians who had been converted to the faith of the goſpel — not with regard to the ſtate in which they were born, but their ſtate previous to their converſion and being quickened in Chriſt Jeſus — as "having their *former converſation* in the luſts of the fleſh,

in fleſh, and fulfilling the deſires of the fleſh," which in no ſenſe can be applicable to infants—and afterwards as *dead* in ſins by a cuſtom of ſinning, which had grown into a habit, and rendered the mind inſenſible to every feeling. To confirm this explication, they further urge that the ſame Apoſtle conſiders man by nature, amidſt all the diſorders, and imperfections of his moral powers, ſtill capable of great and worthy exertions. "For when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by *nature* the things contained in the law; theſe having not the law, are a law unto themſelves, which ſhew the work of the *law written* in their *hearts* accuſing, or elſe excuſing one another." Now, could they be born by *nature* ſinners, and yet by *nature* do the things contained in the law? Could they do by nature the things contained in the law, could they be a law to themſelves and their conſciences bear witneſs and excuſe them, while they were by nature under the wrath of God? Hence they conclude that man is not born under the wrath of God, and therefore not in a ſtate of guilt.

THERE is another paſſage which the abettors of this tenet conſider as unanſwerable, and I ſhall take notice of the more, as from theſe two, one may be enabled to form a pretty exact judgment of the ſtrength of the argument on both ſides. "By one man ſin entered into the world, and death by ſin; ſo death hath paſſed upon all men, for that all have ſinned." Now here, it is ſaid, that the Apoſtle's words are too plain to be denied, and too ſtrong in proof of the point in queſtion to be got over. "*All have ſinned.*" You muſt either exclude infants, therefore, from this *all*, or acknowlege that they have

have ſinned; but this cannot be done, without ſaying further that they are not only exempted from ſin but death; for the *all*, in the one caſe, is of the ſame import with the *all* in the other—"Death hath paſſed upon *all* men, for that *all* have ſinned." In anſwer to this again, it is affirmed, that the words, conſiſtently with the deſign of the writer, or with themſelves, cannot admit of this ſenſe. The deſign of the writer, ſay they, is not to eſtabliſh the doctrine in queſtion, but ſimply to ſhow that the conſequences of the fall, ſin and death, are more than balanced by the gracious plan of redemption — that as ſin and death came by Adam, righteouſneſs and life came by Jeſus Chriſt; ſo that where ſin had abounded grace might much more abound: nor can we with any propriety ſuppoſe that the Apoſtle, who eſtabliſhed all his principles on the ſtrongeſt chain of reaſoning, would have left a doctrine of ſuch infinite moment, to reſt upon a ſingle ſentence in the form of an inference, which does by no means ariſe from any premiſes he had formerly laid down; nay, which is inconſiſtent with the immediately preceding poſition, "that by one man ſin entered into the world." For how could ſin have entered by one man, if all had ſinned in that ſingle act of one? Sin would have entered not by *one* but by *all*, and then the righteouſneſs and life by Chriſt would have ſtood oppoſed, not to ſin and death introduced by Adam, which, as hath been obſerved, is the leading purpoſe of the Apoſtle, but in oppoſition to ſin and death introduced by all. The phraſe therefore, "for that all have ſinned," according to all the rules of ſound reaſoning, can import no more, than that all have ſhared of the effects, or ſuffered by the ſin of one man

man—by that ſin which wrought death and all the evils of our nature.

To invalidate this reaſoning, two objections are offered; *firſt*, That by this interpretation, the ſame thing is made the cauſe and effect: the effect expreſſed in the words is evidently, "ſo death hath paſſed upon all men;" the cauſe, "for that all have ſinned." Now, according to the above explication, ſay they, both amount preciſely to the ſame thing—death hath paſſed upon all, for that all die; where the cauſe of the death of all, "for that all have ſinned," which the Apoſtle had affirmed, is plainly made an effect of that cauſe. In anſwer to this it is ſaid, 1ſt. That the ſame thing is by no means made cauſe and effect: for the cauſe of the death of all is expreſſed in the beginning of the verſe, and not in the concluſion: "by one man ſin entered into the world, and death by ſin"—What death? Not merely the death of Adam, but the death of all his poſterity; "ſo death hath paſſed upon all." The ſin of Adam is, therefore, the cauſe here aſſigned by the Apoſtle, and the ſecond part of the ſentence, "for that all have ſinned," is merely an amplification, and proof from fact, of the truth of the firſt part, "that death hath paſſed upon all," and therefore expreſſes no more than that all actually die: and as a further proof of the propriety of this explication it is contended, that what is here tranſlated, "all have ſinned," ought to have been rendered, "all are become mortal" (ſee Dr. Taylor on this paſſage). But 2dly, it is affirmed, that by taking the words "for that all that have ſinned" in an active ſenſe for the cauſe of the effect, "ſo death hath

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paſſed upon all men," you make the ſin of *all*, the cauſe of the death of *all*, which is both falſe in itſelf, and contrary to the reaſoning of the Apoſtle, that ſin and death entered by one. The Apoſtle, therefore, muſt certainly mean, agreeably to all our ideas of propriety and ſound reaſoning, that, in conſequence of Adam's ſin, he became mortal; death was inflicted upon him as a judicial puniſhment, or became the natural conſequence of his diſobedience; that his poſterity, therefore, by being univerſally ſubjected to death, the effect of Adam's ſin, are in fact treated as if they were ſinners, even thoſe who have not ſinned after the ſimilitude of Adam's tranſgreſſion. This they contend is a juſt and rational account of the words, and agreeable to the general tenor of Scripture; and that inſtead of confounding cauſe and effect, it makes the whole text conſiſtent, intelligible and plain.

THE *ſecond* objection is, that the whole force of this reaſoning goes upon the abſurdity—that all men were preſent, and ſinned perſonally in this one man, what no one was ever fooliſh enough to aſſert—an imputation of guilt being only contended for. But what ſay the opponets is an imputation of guilt? The conſequences of guilt we underſtand, and acknowledge that in the natural order of Providence they may extend through ſucceſſive generations, and involve the innocent as well as the guilty, but guilt which is perſonal, cannot poſſibly be transferred: for what is guilt, but the charge that lies againſt a moral agent, as being a ſinner, or tranſgreſſor of the divine law; and he who is chargeable with ſin is chargeable with the cauſe; or upon

upon what is the charge laid? and if with the cauſe beyond all doubt with the effects: and ſo the concluſion would be the ſame,—that ſin and death were the effects, not of the ſin of *one* man, but of *all* men, which is a downright contradiction, by ſuppoſing that they were cauſes both of natural and moral effects before they were born. This, they inſiſt, is no quirk to evade the force of an argument, but neceſſarily ariſes from the very conſtruction of the words, as explained to ſupport the doctrine of original guilt.

THE opponents of this tenet add further, that the ſciptures not only give no countenance to the doctrine of original guilt, but eſtabliſh clear principles in direct oppoſition to it. Amongſt many others they advance the following: "In thoſe days, ſaith the Lord, they ſhall no more ſay the fathers have eaten ſour grapes, and their children's teeth are ſet on edge, becauſe every man ſhall die in his *own* iniquity; every man that eateth the ſour grapes *his* teeth ſhall be ſet on edge." Now, ſay they, *thoſe days* refer to the goſpel days, as evidently appears from the ſubſequent verſes. "Behold the days come that I will make a new covenant with the houſe of Iſrael, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt," which promiſe they argue cannot poſſibly regard exemption from temporal puniſhment, or the conſequences that ariſe from the order of Providence; though it is introduced in anſwer to a complaint of this kind: for it ſtill holds true that children ſuffer in many inſtances on account of the folly and vices of their parents, even in a rational capacity,

capacity, though in a leſſer degree: this promiſe muſt, therefore, regard the future conſequences of vice, and the effects of guilt in general, as they ſhall appear fairly balanced in the final completion of the divine adminiſtration more fully explained in the goſpel — Under which diſpenſation of divine grace to men, the promiſe gives the fulleſt aſſurance that "the ſon ſhould not bear the iniquity of his father, but that the ſoul that ſinneth ſhall die,"—conſequently that thoſe natural evils which ariſe from the order and conſtitution of Providence, and which may ſeem in the mean time inconſiſtent with juſtice, are permitted, and intended for the happineſs of the ſufferer, if he is not wanting to himſelf, and ſhall be fully accounted for.

ANOTHER principle, which they affirm to be eſtabliſhed in Scripture is,—That it is a law only that can inform us of our duty, when we have tranſgreſſed, and to what puniſhment we ſtand in juſtice expoſed; and this they confirm by the Apoſtolic maxim, "that where there is no law, there is no tranſgreſſion."—And again, "the law worketh wrath." To ſuppoſe, therefore, wrath, or puniſhment, without the tranſgreſſion of a law would be abſurd. And will any one, add they, ſeriouſly maintain, that infants are capable of knowing or tranſgreſſing a law; or that without tranſgreſſion there can be guilt?—That, if there are any ſuch, it is impoſſible to argue with them on the principles of Scripture or of reaſon:—on the principles of Scripture, ſince it is here expreſsly aſſerted, that where there is no law there is no tranſgreſſion: and, what is a law, but a rule of duty enforced by proper authority, fully explained and

underſtood?—On the principles of reaſon; becauſe theſe confirm the doctrine eſtabliſhed in the Scriptures, and gives us the fulleſt aſſurance, on the one hand, that no creature can be the ſubject of a moral law who can neither underſtand nor obey it; and, on the other, that to ſuppoſe ſuch a creature by the conſtitution of its nature ſubjected to final miſery, is utterly inconſiſtent with every idea we can poſſibly form of the righteous Lord of the univerſe.—To ſupport this argument, they reaſon thus:—It depended, without doubt, on the determination of the great Lord of the univerſe, what rank any of his creatures ſhould hold, and, in particular, what ſuperior advantages his rational creatures ſhould enjoy; becauſe *theſe* being the ſole effect of his free bounty, he might have beſtowed them with a more or leſs ſparing hand: while exiſtence, upon the whole, remained a bleſſing, there could be no cauſe of complaint; nothing inconſiſtent with our ideas of divine rectitude. He might have ſubjected them to death, therefore, by the original conſtitution of their nature, or by any other intermediate ſtep, which to infinite wiſdom ſhould appear beſt; but that he ſhould have ſubjected them to a ſtate, wherein they would be expoſed to all the miſery conſequential upon guilt, without any act of their own, or ſaved by a remedy entirely dependent on the pleaſure of another, is impoſſible to ſuppoſe, without the higheſt indignity to the honour and rectitude of his moral government. It would be to repreſent him as ſporting in the moſt cruel and tyrannical exerciſe of his power, and acting in oppoſition to his plaineſt and moſt ſolemn declarations. "Therefore, thou Son of Man ſpeak unto the Houſe of Iſrael, thus ye ſpeak ſaying, if our tranſ-

greſſions

greſſions and our ſins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how ſhould we then live? Say unto them, as I live ſaith the Lord, I have no pleaſure in the death of him that dieth.—Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O Houſe of Iſrael?"

IT is difficult, therefore, ſay they to determine, whether the notion of original ſin, or the expedient that *prieſts* have contrived of waſhing it away, by flinging a few drops of water from their finger ends, is to be conſidered as the greateſt reflection on the righteous Lord.

SUCH is the general ſtate of the argument. If you aſſume the negative, you thereby ſuperſede every diſpute concerning the efficacy of baptiſm in waſhing away original ſin. If you fall in with the orthodox and popular doctrine, and maintain the affirmative, the reaſoning in the former ſection remains entire and unhurt.

SECT. IV.

OF THE EFFICACY ATTENDING THE LORD'S SUPPER.

WE now go forward to the ſecond poſitive inſtitution of Chriſtianity, and ſhall examine into the particular virtues aſcribed to it, formerly taken notice of (ſection II.) The original inſtitution is as follows: "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave unto them, ſaying, this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me. Likewiſe alſo,

after the ſupper the cup, ſaying, this cup is the New Teſtament in my blood ſhed for you; as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye ſhew forth the Lord's death until he come again." This is the inſtitution. And taking it aſide from every human commentary, could one eaſily be brought to think, that this were a *great myſtery?* Surely there is nothing here of which the mind doth not perceive the meaning, the end, the reaſonableneſs and propriety.—Great and diſtinguiſhed events have been commemorated in all ages, and among all nations, by ſome action and external rite or ſymbol expreſſive of public joy and gratitude. Sacred and profane hiſtory are full of them. In conformity to theſe, but more eſpecially to the *paſſover* inſtituted to preſerve the remembrance of a ſignal deliverance, and which the Jews themſelves conſidered as typical of *that* greater by the Meſſiah, when he ſhould come in his power and glory to redeem them from all their enemies, our Lord appoints this memorial of himſelf, and his love to ſinners in laying down his life for them, to be obſerved by all his friends to the end of the world. And what could be more ſuitable to the end he had in view?—Eating and drinking together in a ſocial manner hath ever been eſteemed a ſign of friendſhip, and, at the ſame time, ſerves to ſtrengthen it. Eating and drinking together in a religious view *conſecrates* that friendſhip, and, beſides, hath an immediate tendency in this inſtitution, to impreſs on the mind a deep ſenſe of the ineſtimable bleſſings of *redemption:* of that bread which came down from heaven for the life of men. By external and viſible ſigns it brings to our imagination, more readily, the whole tragedy of our Lord's ſufferings, and affects the ſoul more

more forcibly; thereby exciting every devout affection—particularly, humiliating views of ourſelves, and the moſt profound admiration of the divine condeſcenſion and mercy; a holy indignation, and hearty purpoſes againſt ſin, a noble elevation above the world, and love to one another. All theſe effects this inſtitution is fitted to produce in a moral, gradual, and progreſſive manner, thus operating agreeably to its nature, and ſimilar to every other duty of religion.—Nor doth it any where appear, that it is accompanied with effects of a more extraordinary nature; or that a divine efficacy, or divine virtues, of any kind, are communicated in any other manner.—As there are ſome paſſages of Scripture, however urged in ſupport of thoſe enthuſiaſtic, and we may venture to affirm, equally unſcriptural, and unintelligible notions, of "ſealing to believers the benefits purchaſed by Chriſt;" "giving Chriſt in this Sacrament for ſpiritual food," and in general of God's communicating, in this ordinance, as by a vehicle, immediately and powerfully with the ſouls of men,—by certain manifeſtations, impreſſions, ſpiritual fervors, and effuſions of divine grace. It may be proper to take notice of them, where we ſhall have occaſion to lay open further the nature of this inſtitution, and, at the ſame time, to ſhow how they have been perverted and abuſed.

THE *firſt* is a part of the inſtitution itſelf, "This cup is the New Teſtament in my blood ſhed for you." Now, from this it is inferred, that partaking of the cup, and conſequently of the bread, is the *ſeal* of the new covenant, or the covenant of grace, and if, of the covenant, then of all the bleſſings contained in it.—But

why the ſeal? Do not the words themſelves expreſs their own meaning ſufficiently? Certainly they do: for neither cup nor wine could, in the nature of things, be a New Teſtament; for it is a New Teſtament in blood. "This cup is the New Teſtament in *my blood*," i. e. a new legacy of bleſſings purchaſed and confirmed by blood: the cup or wine, therefore, can be no more than the external ſymbol of this blood. The bleſſings are ſealed by the blood, and the blood is repreſented by the cup, ſo that in truth, if we *will* ſpeak of *ſeals*, the bread and the wine are but the ſigns or ſymbols of the *ſeals* of this New Teſtament;—the bleſſings of which belong to every believer,—to every friend of Chriſt, who doeth whatſoever he commandeth, and, in particular, who doeth *this* in remembrance of him. It is our devout remembrance of the death of the Son of God, and the ſenſe we thereby expreſs of the great bleſſings we hope for by it, with the practical improvement that ariſes from ſuch a public and ſolemn profeſſion of this hope, that conſtitutes the very characteriſtic of this divine inſtitution. "For as oft as ye eat of this bread, and drink of this cup, ye ſhew forth your Lord's death till he come again."—Thus it is evident, that the inſtitution itſelf plainly expreſſes its own meaning and end; ſo that every other virtue, or efficacy appended to it, is wholly the ſuperaddition of human invention.

THE *ſecond* paſſage that deſerves notice is, "The cup of bleſſing which we bleſs, is it not the communion of the blood of Chriſt, and the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Chriſt?" which words, is it ſaid, are a plain declaration, that partaking

taking of the cup and the bread is a direct act of ſpiritual communion between Chriſt and the ſoul. And what if it ſhould? Is not every act of religious worſhip, if performed with a proper temper, an immediate act of ſpiritual communion? Is not prayer in a ſpecial manner, where, in words the moſt humble and fervent, and in poſture the moſt reverent and ſubmiſſive, we addreſs our Maker, an immediate act of ſpiritual communion? When deeply retired within himſelf, the devout worſhipper pours out his ſoul before him who knows his thoughts afar off, and who dwells with the man of a contrite ſpirit—can we ſuppoſe any intercourſe between God and the ſoul more immediate or ſpiritual? Nay, it may be ſaid with the higheſt aſſurance, that he who lives in the habitual and conſcientious diſcharge of his duty, holds daily communion with God. "If we walk in the light as he alſo is in the light, then we have communion with one another, and the blood of Chriſt cleanſeth us from all iniquity"—"If any man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come into him, and make our abode with him." Not one text ſo ſtrong in all the New Teſtament is to be produced to juſtify the extravagant notions concerning the Lord's ſupper.—But, in order to underſtand the real import of theſe words, it is proper to attend to the immediate point the Apoſtle had in view; which, if any one chuſes to look at the words with attention, will evidently appear to be as follows: —Corinthians, your conduct is very inconſiſtent, and highly blameable with regard to the ſacred inſtitution of the ſupper. Is not this ſolemn rite of eating bread and drinking wine, as a memorial of the death of Chriſt, and the grand bene-

fits purchaſed by it, a peculiar badge of your chriſtian character? do ye not thereby profeſs to have renounced heatheniſm and idolatry, and to acknowledge the divine author of this inſtitution for your Lord and Maſter, to ſubmit to his authority, and to be directed by his laws? And will ye yet enter into the temples of idols, and eat things offered to them, and thereby join in communion with unconverted Gentiles in their worſhip of their falſe deities? By eating that bread which repreſents the body of Chriſt, and drinking that wine, which repreſents his blood, ye profeſs to hold communion with him, and to derive your hopes of eternal happineſs from him, and will ye act a part ſo evidently inconſiſtent as likewiſe to hold communion with fictitious Gods, who, in truth, are devils? For, "I ſay that the things which the Gentiles ſacrifice, they ſacrifice unto devils, and I would not that ye ſhould have fellowſhip with devils. Ye cannot drink of the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils, ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils." This is the Apoſtle's argument, and hath entirely a reference to the impious practice immediately taken notice of, which, it ſeems ſome profeſſing chriſtians were led to from their connections with the heathens, or from prejudices ſtill remaining with regard to that worſhip from which they had been ſo lately converted.

A *third* paſſage is, "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himſelf." From which it was pretended, that if the danger of communicating unworthily is ſo great, the advantages ariſing from communicating worthily muſt be in proportion—That worthily participating of this ordinance hath an excellent

cellent tendency to inſpire pious and divine affections into the ſoul, and to promote the ſpiritual life, and that, along with the practice of the other duties of religion, it will gradually form the mind into a heavenly temper, and thereby qualify it for future happineſs, is acknowledged: and that unworthy participating is a high act of profanation, and indicates a mind void of every ſenſe of religion, is likewiſe admitted; but neither the one, nor the other ſave or damn by themſelves; nor was it the intention of the Apoſtle to aſſert any thing ſo abſurd. He ſeems to have had no view to the final puniſhment of wicked men, or unworthy partakers, on the one hand, nor to any peculiar benefits ariſing from worthy partaking, on the other. His diſcourſe refers entirely, as is almoſt univerſally acknowledged, to certain preſent and temporal puniſhments inflicted, immediately by the hand of God, as a viſible diſplay of his diſpleaſure againſt a groſs abuſe of this inſtitution, which the Corinthians were guilty of, and that in ſo notorious a manner, as few, it is preſumed, are likely to be charged with—The caſe was this, under pretence of meeting to celebrate this divine ſervice, they not only made no difference between it and a common meal, but behaved like riotous people in a tavern—ſome of them getting drunk and reeling home from their aſſemblies. This was not to eat the Lord's ſupper, as the Apoſtle tells them: it was converting a ſacred duty into a drunken debauch, and expoſing the chriſtian character in a moſt ſcandalous manner: and therefore as a caution to others, and leſt the heathen ſhould blaſpheme, required ſome manifeſt and ſignal interpoſition of Providence to mark the offenders. "For this cauſe many of them were weak,

and

and many were fallen aſleep." They are therefore warmly admoniſhed to diſcern the Lord's body, that is the great end of this chriſtian ſervice, and that temper which alone could render it acceptable—or if they ſhould engage in this ſolemn and ſacred rite in a thoughtleſs, diſſipated, and licentious manner, they thereby eat and drunk damnation to themſelves—they moſt aſſuredly expoſed themſelves to the divine judgments—ſevere bodily diſeaſes, perhaps death itſelf.

THERE is ſtill one paſſage further that merits particular attention. Romaniſts triumph in it as a deciſive proof of the *real* preſence—and *prieſts* of every denomination as "an irrefragable evidence that ſpiritual life and grace, and a right to immortality, are made to depend on a worthy participation of the *euchariſt*." This noted paſſage is to be found, John, Ch. 6. v. 53, 54. "Then ſaid Jeſus unto them, verily, verily, I ſay unto you, except ye eat the fleſh and drink the blood of the ſon of man, ye have no life in you, whoſo eateth my fleſh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raiſe him up at the laſt day." Theſe are the words, and we beg that the candid reader may follow us ſtep by ſtep, while we attempt to aſcertain the genuine ſenſe of them.

LET it be obſerved then, that the immediate point between our Lord and the Jews was, concerning his divine character: believing on him as the Meſſiah promiſed, and conſequently the evidence of his publick miſſion. This will be found to be the leading queſtion on all occaſions between him and them. This point, in the chapter

ter now before us, was introduced by another — The people had diſcovered a great forwardneſs in following him, after having been miraculouſly fed with a few loaves: Jeſus, who knew what was in man, immediately perceiving their falſe views, tells them without diſguiſe, "Ye ſeek me not becauſe ye ſaw the miracles, but becauſe ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." Ye are entirely led by groſs and carnal views, and do not perceive the evidence of my divine commiſſion, though exhibited in the moſt ſatisfying manner to your ſenſes. — Ye purſue with keenneſs and aſſiduity that bread which periſheth, overlooking altogether that which endureth unto eternal life. Hence it is evident that by the bread that periſheth our Lord refers to the loaves, and by the bread that endureth to everlaſting life, to the hopes of eternal glory by him as the Meſſiah, and the means by which they were to obtain it — for this bread the Son of man *whom the Father had ſealed* was to give. —And that the Jews, though their prejudices would not permit them to attend to the plaineſt and moſt convincing proofs of his divinity, underſtood him as ſpeaking of the means of eternal happineſs under the metaphor of bread, ſeems pretty plain, firſt, becauſe they were habituated to conſider the higheſt ſpiritual bleſſings under this idea, as appears from a maxim eſtabliſhed among them, "Bleſſed is he that ſhall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Luke, chap. 14, 13. Secondly, from the queſtion they immediately put to Jeſus, "What ſhall we do that we might work the works of God?" — He had called upon them to labour for this bread that endureth unto everlaſting life, and they ſeem to be convinced that, as it was to be obtained in no other way,

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it well deſerved their moſt active endeavours: What ſhall we do then that we might work the works of God? What further working doth God require of us as the means of eternal happineſs? We are ſtrict obſervers of the law of Moſes, is any thing further neceſſary? Can we perform any works greater or better, ſeeing he that doth theſe things ſhall live by them? This is the plain meaning of the queſtion, or it can have no connection with what goes before; and in this view it may be conſidered as a ſerious inquiry, or put in the way of ridicule and triumph. Jeſus, however, gives a plain and deciſive anſwer to it; "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath ſent." Ye reſt your hopes of ſalvation on the law, and the works ye perform in obedience to it; theſe ye conſider as your everlaſting food; but I tell you that there is another work which God requires, and by which he is eminently glorified, believing on him whom he hath ſent, — the promiſed Meſſiah, through whom alone you are to look for eternal life; and who now holds out to you the means that lead to it: this is the bread of which I am ſpeaking, and "which the Son of man ſhall give unto you;" becauſe for this end he was ſent into the world and *ſealed* — veſted with a divine commiſſion by the Father. In conſequence of this plain anſwer, which could not be miſtaken, the return made is evidently in point; "What ſign ſhoweſt thou that we may ſee and believe thee?" Our fathers did eat manna in the wilderneſs, &c. verſe 31, 32, Moſes fed our fathers in the wilderneſs for the ſpace of forty years; this was an inconteſtible proof of his divine miſſion, what doſt thou work? Jeſus doth not ſee fit minutely to enter into the argument,

ment, and by a compariſon between himſelf and Moſes, in every point of view, to ſhow his ſuperior character, and that his miſſion was attended with ſuperior evidence; but keeping in his eye the inſtance they had already ſpecified of their having been fed with manna, he continues his ſimilitude, only adopting the word *manna* for that of bread, as he finds occaſion;—and endeavours to perſuade them, that in him they had a more wonderful proof of the extraordinary interpoſition of Providence than their fathers had, in this very inſtance, through the miniſtry of Moſes.—That the bread of which they boaſted was not from heaven in the ſame ſenſe, and for the ſame important ends, that he came from heaven;—that this manna deſcended from the upper regions of the air only; he from the throne of God;—that it adminiſtered for a ſeaſon to a temporal life; that he was that bread of which if a man eat, he ſhall never die: "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, Moſes gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven; for the bread of God is he that cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world."—It is, therefore, ſelf-evident, that our Lord ſpeaks here of himſelf, and the great bleſſings of his ſpiritual kingdom, under the metaphor of bread; and that by eating this bread he underſtands believing in him is no leſs evident, "and Jeſus ſaid unto them, he that cometh unto me ſhall never hunger, and he that believeth on me ſhall never thirſt; but I have ſaid unto you that ye have ſeen me and believe not." I am the bread of which I ſpeak, and by eating of this bread, I mean believing on me: but all the means I have hitherto uſed, though under the apteſt ſimilitudes I have held

held forth the truth unto you, have been in vain.—"ye have ſeen me" "this living bread" "and believe not" v. 35. Can there be any doubt, after this, what our Lord intends by eating his fleſh and drinking his blood? ſeeing his fleſh and his blood were given for the life of the world, that is to obtain all thoſe ſpiritual bleſſings neceſſary to our eternal happineſs, and by faith in him alone theſe bleſſings can be obtained?—Or if there ſhould remain any, the concluſion of this diſcourſe is left on record on purpoſe to remove them. "It is the ſpirit that quickeneth, the fleſh profiteth nothing, the words that I ſpeak they are ſpirit and they are life." The whole ſtrain of this diſcourſe is to be interpreted in a ſpiritual ſenſe, ye are, therefore, wholly inexcuſable if ye miſtake my words, or pretend to ſtumble, as if they carried the abſurdity in them—of this man, giving his fleſh to eat.

BUT ſetting aſide this plain key to the words, it appears from other conſiderations, that they cannot poſſibly refer to this Chriſtian ſervice. It was not yet inſtituted, and, therefore, they to whom Chriſt ſpeaks could have no notion of it, nor form any idea of his meaning; how then could they be blameable on this account;—upon what grounds could he find fault with them? Beſides, the words in queſtion are evidently an univerſal propoſition adapted to all times and places, without exception where the religion of Chriſt is, or ſhall be known; and to the very time and circumſtances in which they were ſpoken. Now, in the firſt place, if we ſuppoſe them immediately applicable to the Lord's Supper, they were by no means adapted to the circumſtances of thoſe to whom

whom Chriſt addreſſes himſelf; for they were not yet believers;—and can we admit any thing ſo abſurd, as that he ſhould explain to unbelievers the import and peculiar virtues of a particular external rite of his religion, and which in a ſpecial manner is conſidered as a badge of it?—That he ſhould charge them with ignorance and obſtinacy in not underſtanding, or oppoſing a detached part of a ſyſtem, while they were ignorant of, and rejected the whole?—Neither, in the ſecond place, is it univerſally true, that he who hears the Goſpel preached, and profeſſes to believe it, may have acceſs to partake of the *Euchariſt*. His ſituation in life may render it utterly impracticable; and yet the propoſition admits of no limitation; "Except ye eat the fleſh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." They muſt, therefore, admit of a ſenſe applicable to every ſituation in which the Chriſtian can be placed:—add to this, that there is an efficacy aſcribed to this eating and drinking, which the wildeſt enthuſiaſt, or the moſt furious bigot, will not pretend to aſcribe to the act of communicating, "whoſo eateth my fleſh, and drinketh my blood, hath *eternal life*, and I will raiſe him up at the laſt day." Hold, you go too far. Moſt aſſuredly he who partakes *worthily* ſhall have eternal life—What do you mean by partaking *worthily*? Is it partaking with proper diſpoſitions of ſoul, faith, love, godly ſorrow? No doubt; theſe are characteriſtics of a good man, and a good man ſhall certainly be ſaved by *this* along with the other means of religion. But will any one be fooliſh, or preſumptuous enough to aſſert that the ſimple act of eating and drinking ſaves? This eating and drinking, therefore, muſt, in the very

nature

nature of it, refer to ſomething, to which, agreeably to the whole tenor of Scripture, *eternal life* is abſolutely promiſed: and *that* is faith in Jeſus Chriſt the Son of God, the Saviour of the word.

IN oppoſition to this it is ſaid, that this interpretation makes fleſh and blood ſignify the doctrine of Chriſt, which cannot be, ſeeing it is expreſsly ſaid, "That the bread that I will give is my fleſh, which I will give for the life of the world:" but Chriſt's doctrine was not offered up for the life of the world, but his fleſh and his blood only." True, the doctrine of Chriſt was not offered up: no one ever thought of aſſerting a thing ſo ſenſeleſs. But is it not *the capital* and diſtinguiſhing doctrine of Chriſtianity, that Chriſt was offered up to bear the ſins of many—and that he actually bore our ſins on his own body on the tree? May not faith in this propoſition, therefore, with the doctrines, precepts, and inſtitutes inſeparably connected with it, and reſting upon it as their foundation, with the greateſt propriety ſtand for the whole ſyſtem of his religion? And doth it not preciſely amount to the ſame thing, whether we ſay we are ſaved by the doctrine of Chriſt, or by Chriſt dying, ſeeing his ſufferings and death ſignified by giving his fleſh, is the great object of the chriſtian's faith, and the primary doctrine of his religion? How pitiful is it then, to quibble about words, and to pretend to avail one's ſelf of difference of ſounds when the ſenſe is obviouſly the ſame? Nothing can be more unworthy of the candour or dignity of a reaſoner.—We may, upon the whole, therefore, pronounce with the utmoſt aſſurance that this noted paſſage can have no relation to this inſtitution.

IT

IT may be thought, that there is an evident mark of diſtinction put upon this ordinance, by the particular revelation made concerning it to the Apoſtle Paul. But there can be no weight in this: becauſe not merely with regard to this inſtitution but the whole ſyſtem of chriſtianity, the Apoſtle was inſtructed by immediate revelation. "I certify unto you, brethren, that the Goſpel which was preached of me was not after man: for I neither received it of man, nor was I taught it but by the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt. For when it pleaſed God to reveal his Son in me, I went not up to Jeruſalem, I conferred not with fleſh and blood — Now the thing that I write unto you, before God I lie not." This inſtitution, therefore, ſtands exactly on the ſame foot, as to the Apoſtle's knowledge of it, with the other parts of Chriſtianity.

SECT. V.

OF THE RIGHT OF DISPENSING THE POSITIVE INSTITUTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY.

AN important branch of this inquiry ſtill remains, and that is, — ſuppoſing for argument's ſake, that *theſe* inſtitutions are attended with all the extraordinary virtues that *prieſtcraft* or enthuſiaſm have aſcribed to them — To whom doth the diſpenſation of them properly belong? Are they a part of the common rights of Chriſtianity, or are they committed into the hands of a certain order of men, who have the ſole and excluſive right of adminiſtrating them? Muſt the body of

chriſtians receive them from *their* hands, or *loſe* the benefit of them? If the ſacraments are really what eccleſiaſtics of every denomination almoſt, would make them, and come up to the idea we have given of them from their own words. (Sect. 2d.) This is ſurely a queſtion of the greateſt moment. It is a queſtion whether the great bleſſings which the Goſpel exhibits, and renders neceſſary to our Salvation, are left open to every individual, or are converted into a mere monopoly. The liberty with which Chriſt hath made us free depends on the anſwer.—And though, from what hath been already offered, it appears with the cleareſt evidence; that whatever privileges belong to the church of Chriſt, belong to the body of chriſtians in general, and to every particular ſociety met in his name and agreeable to his laws; that the notion of Apoſtolic ſucceſſion, and the myſterious chain eſtabliſhed by *laying on of hands* is entirely without foundation; and that what are called the ſacraments are poſſeſſed of no ſpecial efficacy by any immediate divine appointment or promiſe, as diſtinguiſhed from the other parts of religion—In order, if poſſible, to lay the ax to the root of the tree, and ſtrike at every pillar on which Eccleſiaſtic uſurpation ſtands; we ſhall *now* endeavour to ſhow, that no order of prieſts have any excluſive right of adminiſtration, but that *theſe* inſtitutions are a part of the common privileges of Chriſtianity.—To begin with baptiſm.

AND here we are ſufficiently ſenſible, that the whole church of Rome expreſsly deny the neceſſity of a prieſt to adminiſter, and even anathematize thoſe who affirm the contrary; and ſo far they are conſiſtent with themſelves,

ſelves, while they affirm that the mere application of the external rite waſhes away original ſin, and brings the grace of juſtification into the ſoul; neither have the church of England expreſsly aſſerted that it is neceſſary, though it can admit of no doubt, that the ſentiments of the original compilers of their ſervice, at baptiſm, point evidently this way. What length the church of Scotland have gone on this head, will be beſt ſeen from their public confeſſion — And in general it is well known that the whole body of *nonjurors*, and *high flyers* of every denomination, agree in maintaining the neceſſity of *prieſtly* ordination to give validity to this inſtitution. This point, notwithſtanding thoſe who hold the negative, appears, therefore, to merit particular attention.

THE firſt ſermon that the apoſtle Peter preached had the happy effect of converting three thouſand ſouls. There were but twelve apoſtles, Matthias included; and and we have no reaſon to think that the one hundred and twenty that compoſed the infant-church were veſted with any ſpecific commiſſion. The original form of baptiſm was immerſion, or dipping in water, whence the Apoſtle Paul calls it, "being buried with Chriſt in baptiſm."—Now can any one, in his ſober ſenſes, imagine that the twelve Apoſtles went to work, and with their own hands immerſed three thouſand? Allowing an equal ſhare to every Apoſtle, two hundred and fifty;—this had been a huge taſk. Is it reaſonable, therefore, to ſuppoſe, that the new converts performed the work themſelves under the eye of the Apoſtles, or that the whole church aſſiſted in this ceremony. And very be-

coming it was, in ſuch circumſtances, that they who themſelves were already initiated into the Chriſtian faith, ſhould aſſiſt in receiving their new proſelyted brethren, under this, or any other inſtituted form, as an evidence of their common profeſſion: and that they were all baptized we cannot doubt, the hiſtorian expreſly informing us, "that they who gladly heard the word were baptized;" and which muſt neceſſarily refer to the three thouſand immediately mentioned, for we read of no more who believed at this time. Beſides, there is no inſtance of believing without baptiſm immediately following upon it.

SOON after Peter and John, having wrought a notable miracle, we are informed that five thouſand more believed. Who were to perform the office of baptiſm? Peter and John? Impoſſible; and we have no authority to conclude, that any more of the Apoſtolic claſs were preſent; for only Peter and John went up into the temple to pray. But ſuppoſing the twelve at hand, were they equal to the mighty labour of plunging five thouſand? It is by no means credible. Add to this, that the preſent circumſtances were very unfavourable for ſuch a work.—A council of prieſts being inſtantly aſſembled full of deadly rage againſt Peter and John, and concerting how they might deſtroy them; and which, by the way, furniſhes another preſumptive argument, that the other Apoſtles were not preſent, or they would doubtleſs have been involved in the common plan of deſtruction; and yet they do not appear before the council, nor are their names ſo much as mentioned. We may certainly

certainly conclude, therefore, that theſe five thouſand were not baptized by the hands of the Apoſtles.

To remove this difficulty, it may poſſibly be alleged, that the ſeventy ſent by our Lord himſelf upon an extraordinary embaſſy, and who probably were of the hundred and twenty that aſſembled at Jeruſalem after his reſurrection, aſſiſted at this work. To this it may be anſwered, that mere conjecturing is by no means to be admitted in a caſe that requires poſitive evidence;—*perhaps* they aſſiſted,—*perhaps* they did not. Both are equally ſatisfactory, if we could affirm nothing further. But to throw the weight on the negative ſide. It ought to be obſerved, that, beſides their not being once mentioned by the writer of the apoſtolic acts, we know nothing about the duration of their commiſſion. It is juſt narrated by Luke, without further notice being taken of them, or, of it, ſo that we cannot even pretend to ſay, that they acted in their extraordinary capacity, during all the time of our Lord's abode upon earth.—The contrary, at leaſt, is probable, and that their commiſſion, which ſeems to have been intended to make way for his reception, and was certainly limited to the Jewiſh nation, was temporary only. The twelve had a ſimilar commiſſion, but it did not conſtitute their apoſtolic character. It was neceſſary, therefore, that they ſhould receive a new embaſſy to teach and baptize, and the ſeventy not being included in this laſt and characteriſtic commiſſion, gives us the higheſt preſumption, if not the moſt ſatisfying evidence, that they were not deſigned for the ſame public work.

IN further confirmation, that the diſpenſation of this ordinance doth not depend on *prieſtly* ordination, let it be obſerved, that when Peter was called to attend Cornelius, the Roman Centurion,—in expectation of the Apoſtle, to whom, admoniſhed by a viſion, he had ſent a ſpecial meſſage; the good man had brought together a goodly number of his friends. Peter arrives, is gladly received, preaches Jeſus, and "the Holy Ghoſt fell on them that heard the word." Well, "can any one forbid that theſe ſhould be baptized?" No, ſurely. But who is to perform the office, and adminiſter the *ſacrament* of baptiſm? Who, but Peter? No ſuch thing. The venerable Apoſtle had not yet it ſeems, laid the foundation of his future *church*, or been ſo well acquainted with the ſecret of the *keys* as his ſucceſſors. "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." But on whom could he lay his commands? doubtleſs on "thoſe of the circumciſion who believed"—a few private chriſtians who were diſtinguiſhed by no eccleſiaſtic commiſſion: for there was neither Apoſtle nor Elder with him.

THE Apoſtle Paul himſelf was baptized by a private diſciple: "And there was a certain *diſciple* at Damaſcus named *Ananias*, and to him ſaid the Lord, ariſe and go—call for Saul of Tarſus, and he entered the houſe and put his hands upon him, and he received his ſight, and aroſe and was baptized." But Ananias, it will be ſaid, had a ſpecial commiſſion, and that God may employ what inſtruments he pleaſes in carrying forward his own ends. So he may, and ſo he doth. But let it be obſerved, never in oppoſition to his own eſtabliſhed and declared

declared plan. He might have employed any tribe in Iſrael as well as that of Levi, to have miniſtred to him in holy things. They had no natural or preferable right. The difference reſted alone on the divine determination: but after that tribe was particularly marked out for the ſacred office, and the divine commiſſion extended, we do not obſerve that infinite wiſdom recedes in one ſtep from it—The application is obvious with regard to the point in view. If the Apoſtles or thoſe authoriſed by them, had been the only perſons empowered in the New Teſtament-Œconomy to baptize, this would have been a declared limitation of that right to a certain Eccleſiaſtic order; and it would have been a plain receſſion from the divine inſtitution to have employed a private diſciple in this ſacred department—a thing that ought not to be ſuppoſed, or admitted, but where the ſame end would not have been anſwered by the eſtabliſhed plan of Providence, which cannot be pretended in the preſent caſe: becauſe it is evident that the circumſtances of Paul's converſion might have been ſo ordered as to have brought him with equal advantage under the immediate care of an Apoſtle, or ſome one holding a miniſterial commiſſion in the ſtated order of ſucceſſion; or one of this claſs might have been appointed to attend this extraordinary convert. The employing of a private diſciple, therefore, if it was not intended on purpoſe, plainly ſhows that no general plan was eſtabliſhed, by which this rite was confined to any order of men by a divine law.

IF from all this it is not ſelf evident that the validity of baptiſm doth not depend on ordination, or any mode

of miniſterial ſucceſſion, it appears, at leaſt, with ſuch probability, as will ſatisfy every candid inquirer—where things are left ſo much in general, without any definitive-law, or fixed rule to which we can appeal; and, certainly, ought to make thoſe who differ in opinion very modeſt in their deciſions.

WHY then, it will be ſaid, did Chriſt himſelf give a particular commiſſion to the Apoſtles to baptize—a ſpecial commiſſion ſeems to be without any meaning if it is not limited to the perſons mentioned in it? To this the anſwer appears by no means difficult. The commiſſion to the Apoſtles is not properly a commiſſion empowering them to baptize. This is not intended as the *ſpeciality* of it. Baptiſm had been immemorially practiſed among the Jews as a rite of admiſſion to all their proſelytes. There was, therefore, nothing peculiar here as the object of a new commiſſion, this rite being a mere transference of an external mode from the Jewiſh to the Chriſtian Church.—The great deſign of the apoſtolic commiſſion evidently regards the ſingular work in which they were to be engaged—of witneſſing for their Lord, and preaching his goſpel to all nations: a work to which no human power were equal. It required a ſpecial call, and ſpecial aſſiſtance. *This* call, and the *aſſurance* of *this* aſſiſtance, are ſurely the ſubſtance and ſtrength of the apoſtolic commiſſion. True, they were likewiſe to baptize under new names expreſſive of the plan of redemption, and of the faith and hope of Chriſtians. But there was nothing in this that required an extraordinary commiſſion: nothing but what any one might perform. Not ſo—to preach the goſpel in ſpirit and in power;

to

to riſe ſuperior to the opinion, the principles, the fear of the world, to endure all things for the ſake of Chriſt, and not to "count their life too dear ſo they might fulfil the miniſtry they had received of the Lord Jeſus." Hence the Apoſtles every where ſpeak of preaching the Goſpel as their great work, and what ſpecially diſtinguiſhed their commiſſion: "It is not reaſon that we ſhould leave the word of God, we will give ourſelves continually to the *miniſtry* of the *word*;" by which is certainly to be underſtood, preaching the Goſpel, as is evident from the application of this phraſe the *word* through the whole New Teſtament — excepting where it is applied to Chriſt himſelf the divine author of it. In conformity to this account, the Apoſtle Paul tells us that Chriſt ſent him not to baptize, but to preach the Goſpel, and that he baptized only Criſpus and Gaius, with the houſhold of Stephanus. "Beſides, I know not if I baptized any other." Nor in any of his Epiſtles, while he inſiſts at large on the duties of the miniſterial office, doth he once mention baptiſm as a part of this work — Can any one then permit himſelf to think, that the ſame ideas were entertained of this rite in the Apoſtolic age, that have ſince been adopted and propagated by Eccleſiaſtics?

WE now go on to inquire how far the Holy Supper is the common privilege of Chriſtianity.

THOUGH the twelve were only preſent with our Lord when this chriſtian ſervice was inſtituted, it ſeems evident from the nature of it, that they repreſented every future ſociety, and that it was deſigned as the common duty

duty and privelege of chriſtians. There is not one inſinuation of a power of diſpenſing it peculiar to *them* as eccleſiaſtic officers. It was an action to be performed by his diſciples and followers in remembrance of him, untill he ſhould come again, and that without exception of perſons, time, or place. The Apoſtles had not at the firſt celebration received their commiſſion in that character. It is plain they were not yet fitted for it. "And I brought him unto thy diſciples, and they could not cure him." They did not yet believe that Chriſt was to riſe again. "But we truſted it had been he who ſhould have redeemed Iſrael." Their faith was limited and extremely imperfect. In the character, therefore of private diſciples they partook of the ſupper, and as a pattern to others.

IN confirmation of this, it is to be particularly attended to—firſt—That their Apoſtolic commiſſion doth not once mention this inſtitution as any part of it, or in the remoteſt degree as belonging to the Apoſtolic office—ſecondly—That, when the Apoſtle Paul delivers this inſtitution to the Corinthians by immediate revelation, as a law to which they were to appeal, and a rule by which afterwads, in their chriſtian aſſemblies, they were to be directed, he takes notice neither of the manner, nor powers of adminiſtration, but plainly ſpeaks of it as the common and indiſpenſible duty of all chriſtians—If there had been any peculiarity attending this inſtitution —if it had been unlawful to receive the ſymbols of bread and wine, but from the hand of an Apoſtle, or one deriving powers in the order of Apoſtolic ſucceſſion; it is wonderful, that neither the inſtitution itſelf, the original

nal Apoſtolic mandate, nor Paul's delivery to the church of Corinth on this head, ſhould take any notice of it—By what authority, therefore, if in neither of theſe, nor in any other part of ſcripture, there is any limitation mentioned, or any appropriation in virtue of original powers, or ſubſequent ſucceſſion, to eccleſiaſtics—by what authority have they arrogated this privilege to themſelves, ſo as to render it unlawful for a ſociety of chriſtians, agreeably to the laws of decency and order, to celebrate this memorial? If they have any ſuch authority let them produce it. We diſpute not, that the firſt miniſters of religion did preſide in this ſervice. But the queſtion is whether it would have been competent,—where they neither were, nor could be preſent,—for a ſociety of chriſtians aſſembled for the purpoſes of public devotion and worſhip, to read the ſcriptures, to pray, to praiſe, to have empowered one of their own number to adminiſtrate this inſtitution, or any other public ſervice in religion—one diſtinguiſhed by natural abilities and chriſtian gifts? I maintain the affirmative, and would be glad to be informed upon what principles of ſcripture or reaſon it can be re-argued.

IT cannot be affirmed, I imagine, with any plauſibility, that the firſt Chriſtians were never in this ſituation, or that Chriſtians may not at any time be reduced to it. Before we read of the appointment of one beſides the Apoſtles, the church had encreaſed to twelve thouſand one hundred and twenty ſouls, who were, no doubt, divided into many different aſſemblies, and little ſocieties, frequently far ſeparated from one another, and with

with whom the Apoſtles could hold no perſonal communion.

THERE were at Jeruſalem, who heard Peter's ſermon on the day of Penticoſt, an immenſe concourſe from different and diſtant parts of the world; and it would appear from the narrative, that the three thouſand who believed chiefly conſiſted of theſe; many of whom, we may well ſuppoſe, would after the feaſt, return to their own country. Were they to be deprived of the advantage of celebrating the memorial of their Saviour's dying love? Or did they carry eccleſiaſtic officers with them to their ſeveral abodes?—But ſetting aſide every other conſideration, it is well known that perſecution quickly aroſe. In every quarter chriſtians had enemies who were ſpies upon their conduct. Saul watched all their motions with the eye of an active and bloody perſecutor, and had a ſigned commiſſion from the high prieſt, "to bring all bound to Jeruſalem in *that* way whether men or women." In ſuch circumſtances, obliged to fly for their ſafety, their ſocieties muſt have been very private, and widely diſperſed. "They were all ſcattered abroad, ſays the hiſtorian, throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, *except the Apoſtles.*" Shall we conclude then, that the whole body of chriſtians lived in the total neglect of this inſtitution? This reaſoning is ſtill further ſupported from the rapid progreſs of the Goſpel, after the converſion of the Apoſtle Paul, by whoſe miniſtry, in a ſpecial manner, it was ſpread over Greece and leſſer Aſia; ſo that you could hardly find a corner where chriſtian ſocieties were not formed. Who can imagine that all theſe could have acceſs to an apoſtle, or ſtated miniſter

niſter of apoſtolic appointment among them. "And upon the firſt day of the week, when the diſciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow." This is evidently mentioned as this ordinary and ſtated meeting, and not occaſioned by Paul's being with them; it was on the firſt day of the week. It was to break bread—the day univerſally devoted to religious duties—a practice uniformly obſerved on that day.

DID not Barnabas and Paul "ordain them elders in every church;"—and did they not make a wide circuit from their ſetting out from Antioch in Syria, to their return thither again? That they ordained elders in every church, the hiſtorian informs us; but whoever will attend to the preceeding and ſubſequent narrative muſt certainly ſee, that he by no means intends to affirm, that they ordained elders in every Chriſtian ſociety reſiding in the reſpective places through which they paſſed. It ſeems evident, that this ordination extended only to Derbe, Lyſtra, Iconium, and Antioch in Piſidia. It may be, no doubt, probably concluded, that the ſame reaſons that induced them to ſettle ſtated miniſters in thoſe places, would led them to do ſo in others. But ſuppoſing that they did, two things deſerve attention: that prior to the appointment of Barnabas and Paul, or their progreſs from Antioch, there were Chriſtians in the different cities, as well as at Antioch, who met together on the firſt day of the week; that the journeying of Paul in company with Barnabas, was but a ſmall part of his travels. In all *theſe* he found Chriſtians, the number of which, by his zeal, knowlege, and boldneſs, he

he greatly encreaſed, but we do not read of his fixing elders among them. It is probable that their particular ſituation did not yet admit of it;—but whether he did or not is wholly immaterial in this queſtion; as it ſeems evident, beyond contradiction, from what hath been obſerved, that, from the early number of converts from different and diſtant parts, and the diſperſion occaſioned by a perſecution ſhortly after the Apoſtles had opened their commiſſion, the primitive Chriſtians, in many inſtances, muſt have been left to ſettle an order and œconomy among themſelves for the diſpenſing of this inſtitution, and regulating every other Chriſtian ſervice. It hath, in the former chapter, been obſerved, that beſides the Apoſtles, and thoſe immediately employed by them, there were other extraordinary inſtruments engaged for edifying the body of Chriſtians. But as we cannot certainly define the extent of their powers or authority, it would be unreaſonable to ſuppoſe, that every Chriſtian ſociety was furniſhed with one of theſe as a miniſter, teacher, or preſident. It could not have been. *Their* work was not ſtationary.—There would have been in this caſe no occaſion at all for the ordination of elders, or the further appointment of any Eccleſiaſtic officer, by Apoſtolic authority. We may therefore conclude, on all the principles of probability, that the firſt Chriſtians did meet together in their religious aſſemblies, and perform this, and every other public office, in virtue of delegated powers of their own;—powers belonging to the Church of Chriſt, and transferable according to the neceſſity and circumſtances of the caſe.

LET us now conſider this point in another view, and make

make the appeal to the candid and rational Chriſtian — And, firſt, let me aſk from whence ariſes the obligation to the obſervance of this inſtitution? The anſwer can admit of no doubt — from the authority of the command — from gratitude. And can any one bring himſelf to believe, that what I am commanded to do, in virtue of the higheſt authority; and what I am called upon to do, in point of gratitude, — that what is made my own perſonal act — an act expreſſive of certain dutiful and pious affections, can poſſibly be reſtricted to the intermediate offices, or inſtrumentality of others, who act by powers which I can neither give nor take away? If this carry not an abſurdity in the face of it, there is no ſuch thing to be found.——Again, I would aſk what is the plain deſign of this inſtitution? The anſwer is equally plain; "As oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do ſhew forth the Lord's death till he come" — The Lord's death, why? Becauſe hereby Chriſtians profeſs to believe that deliverance from the power of death, pardon of ſin, peace with God, grace here, and glory hereafter were purchaſed. Now if theſe great and ineſtimable bleſſings are open to all; if all are importunately called upon to come and ſhare in them; who on earth hath any right to ſeclude me from the memorial of them? Is the memorial more ſacred than the things remembered? If the humble penitent come ſenſible of his miſery, and eagerly deſiring the bleſſings of the Goſpel, he ſhall not be rejected, he ſhall not be ſent away empty. "If any man thirſt, let him come to me and drink, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wiſe caſt out" — Nor has he the leaſt need for this purpoſe to apply to any *prieſt* on earth, whether ſupreme or ſubordinate.

ſubordinate. The door of mercy ſtands open, and there is an "High Prieſt of our profeſſion who hath paſſed into the heavens, and there lives to make interceſſion — ſo that if any man ſin, there is an Advocate with God the Father." And this Advocate is the *friend* of man, "touched with a fellow-feeling of our infirmities;" and ſhall it be unlawful for him to eat bread and drink wine with a chearful heart, ſanctified by a deep ſenſe of religion, and a grateful remembrance of this Divine Benefactor through whom he hath acceſs to God? Is he judged worthy to be admitted to the greater, and ſhall he be denied the leſs? Can he approach the dread tribunal with humble boldneſs, "drawing nigh in the full aſſurance of faith;" and ſhall it depend on the pleaſure of a man like himſelf whether he ſhall approach the table of the Lord, and do this in remembrance of him who hath laid the foundation of this "hope towards God?" Still more: is this Chriſtian ſervice "a ſeal to every believer of all the benefits purchaſed by Chriſt to his ſpecial nouriſhment and growth in grace?" Is Chriſt given in this holy ſacrament for our ſpiritual food and ſuſtenance? Do we thereby dwell in Chriſt, and Chriſt in us, and ſhall the external adminiſtration be limited to a certain order of men, without whoſe intermediate offices I can have no right to partake? Theſe are queſtions on the principles of Chriſtianity and common ſenſe, that, one would be apt to think, carry their own negative in them.

SECT.

SECT. VI.

OF THE CONSECRATION OF THE ELEMENTS.

IN the Levitical ſervice, Conſecration regarded perſons, things, and places; and it is ſufficiently known what were the forms peculiar to each of theſe. The ſame practice obtained among the heathen nations, accompanied, with the wildeſt ſuperſtition, and the moſt ridiculous ceremonies: an inſtance of which we have in the conſecration of Nebuchadnezzar's golden image—Similar to theſe, and no leſs ridiculous, are the numerous conſecrations ſtill obſerved by the church of Rome, ſo formed to beget that ſuperſtitious reverence, and timid ſubmiſſion neceſſary to maintain her eccleſiaſtic policy—Unluckily, however, the New Teſtament furniſhes not one example of this kind. Every ſpecies of external pageantry is utterly inconſiſtent with the ſimplicity and ſpirituality of its worſhip. "The words that I ſpeak unto you, they are ſpirit, and they are life." Holineſs is *here* diſengaged from every thing foreign and adventitious. It *conſecrates* ſoul and body for the ſervice of God—a living ſacrifice.

As an exception to this general aſſertion, it will, no doubt, be ſaid that Chriſt, by bleſſing the bread and wine before partaking, conſecrated them in the moſt ſolemn manner; and as from this idea, and the ordinary forms of conſecration of the external ſymbols, is to be derived in a great meaſure thoſe confuſed notions con-

cerning myſtery, and immediate communications, that are thought to diſtinguiſh this from every other duty of religion, it is of ſome importance to explain, and ſet this matter in its genuine point of light.

THE form of expreſſion, "Jeſus took the bread and bleſſed it" is only uſed by Matthew and Mark, which they too vary with regard to the cup: in the place of "bleſſed it" ſubſtituting the words "gave thanks:" and both Luke and Paul adopt this laſt form. Whatever, therefore, is the plain and genuine meaning of *giving thanks*, the ſame in all good conſtruction, muſt be the ſenſe of *bleſſing*. Now with regard to the firſt, the circumſtances of the caſe will determine with ſufficient clearneſs. "With deſire, ſaid our Lord, have I deſired to eat this paſſover:" why ſo vehemently deſire to partake of this feaſt? becauſe it was the paſſover immediately to precede, and, as it were, the prologue to his ſufferings and death—thoſe ſufferings, and that death which were to procure life and happineſs to guilty men: prompted, therefore, by the moſt ardent and generous love, he looks paſſionately forward to this event; and having now finiſhed this laſt ſupper, he takes the cup of thankſgiving into his hands, according to the manner of the Jews at the cloſe of their paſſover, and pronounces over it a ſhort and ſolemn prayer; in which, it is probable, he did not differ from their uſual and ſtated form—And now having bread and wine before him, apt repreſentations of his body which was to be broken, and of his blood which was to be ſhed; he again took the cup, and having again given thanks—no doubt ſuitably to the deſign that lay before him in fulfilling

fulfilling the great purpoſe of eternal love, he gave them to his diſciples as a memorial of that love—a memorial of that paſſover of which the former was but a type, and by which it was to be for ever ſuperſeded.

THIS is a plain account of our Lord's *bleſſing* or *giving thanks* both as it regards the paſſover, and the inſtitution of the ſupper: for it evidently appears from the evangeliſt Luke that there were two thankſgivings, the one relative to the former, the other to the latter. If any thing further is intended by our Lord's bleſſing or giving thanks—a poſitive diſtinguiſhing bleſſing accompanying the act of communicating, it extends equally to miniſters and people. It doth not depend upon any adminiſtrator. It is a bleſſing already obtained, and ſhall be moſt aſſuredly conferred on every ſincere and devout communicant—Where our gracious Lord hath made no limitation, where he hath left the bleſſings of his Goſpel free from every reſtraint, it is the higheſt preſumption and impiety in poor mortals, to pretend to aſſume excluſive privileges, and to narrow the path.

SECT. VII.

THE DOCTRINE OF PROTESTANTS ON THIS SUBJECT NOT MISREPRESENTED.

IT will, no doubt, be objected to the reaſoning in the former pages, that it unavoidably leads the reader to conclude, that it is the doctrine of proteſtants—

that the efficacy of this ſacrament depends on the adminiſtrator: and this, it will be ſaid is a groſs miſrepreſentation. That this doctrine is no where maintained, and publickly avowed by proteſtants, is acknowleged; but, at the ſame time, it is true, that, however forward they may be in reprobating the doctrines and tenets of popery, in many inſtances, and in this among others, they are careful to retain what is moſt dangerous and alarming in the ſpirit of it—a dominion over the conſciences of men. For, while they have been very liberal in aſcribing extraordinary virtues to this ordinance, they have taken the excluſive right of diſpenſing it into their own hands—not in point of public order, or in virtue of any powers derived from the chriſtian ſociety, but as conſtituting an order poſſeſſed of peculiar powers, and independent of their choice. And where lies the mighty difference to a private chriſtian, whether the efficacy depends on the *prieſt*, or whether this ſacred rite cannot be adminiſtred without him? —If there are in nature certain medicines for the cure of particular diſeaſes, what doth it avail the patient, if they are committed into the hands of an order of licentiates, who are entruſted with excluſive powers of diſpenſing them —whether the virtues reſide in the medicines, or in the licentiates, ſince they can have no acceſs to the one without the other? The patient may die as certainly by the inattention or obſtinacy of the licentiate as if no ſuch remedies exiſted—What ſignifies it to me, that there are certain ſpiritual medicines, called ſacraments, poſſeſſed of extraordinary virtues in curing the diſeaſes of the ſoul, if by the divine appointment, I can have no acceſs to them but through the hands of a popiſh, or proteſtant

proteſtant prieſt—whether they reſide in the prieſt or in the ſacrament?—If I am ready to periſh for hunger, my life depends upon the man who gives, or with-holds from me a morſel of bread; and yet in one ſenſe, it may be ſaid, that the morſel of bread, not the man, ſaves my life; that the want of it kills me, not his inhumanity: but who in his wits would be ſatisfied with ſuch a wretched diſtinction? And yet the diſtinction between the virtues reſiding in the prieſt, and in the ſacraments appears to me, not to be more ſolid or juſt, while proteſtants are diſpoſed to allow to eccleſiaſtics the excluſive claim of diſpenſing them, and, at the ſame time, the neceſſity and efficacy of them: becauſe they certainly thereby admit that they are as neceſſary as the ſacraments themſelves: and he is a ſhameful rogue of a prieſt that would deſire more.

SECT. VIII.

OF THE ABSURD CONSEQUENCES ARISING FROM THE CLAIMS OF ECCLESIASTICS.

THOUGH, in the courſe of this argument, we have been neceſſarily led to bring under the eye of the reader, more than once, ſome conſequences that unavoidably ariſe from the ſyſtem of *prieſtcraft*; it may now be proper to trace *theſe* more at large, and on more general principles.

Now there is not one principle aſcertained by a more fixed and unerring ſtandard than this:—that whatever is

neceſſary and eſſential to all, as moral and religious beings, ought to be common to all: becauſe to ſuppoſe that neceſſary to my happineſs which is not in my own power, or wholly depends on the good pleaſure of another, over whom I have no authority, and concerning whoſe intentions or diſpoſitions I can have no ſecurity, is to ſuppoſe a conſtitution the moſt fooliſh and ill natured, utterly inconſiſtent with our ideas of a wiſe and good agent. Every religious ſyſtem, therefore, that leads to this concluſion is abſurd.—And yet ſuch is the ſyſtem of *prieſtly* policy we have been endeavouring to overturn. For if what are called the Sacraments are neceſſary to ſalvation, and yet the diſpenſation of them is really entruſted into the hands of others, and lies at their diſcretion, my ſalvation is thereby ſuſpended on a condition independent of my choice, or any poſſible exertion of my moral or intellectual powers, and this without any check or controul.—For let us ſuppoſe this notion of the indiſſoluble connection between Sacraments and a *certain* order of *prieſts* univerſally to obtain, and at the ſame time that theſe heavenly truſtees ſhould at any time take it into their heads — not to diſpenſe theſe *ſeals* of the covenant of grace: who, I deſire to know, has a right to compel them? Whom can you figure to yourſelf bold enough to aſſume an authority over men holding a divine commiſſion with the keys of heaven and hell in their hands? The moſt powerful ſecular on earth, believing, in good earneſt, the pretenſion of theſe venerable men to be well founded, would tremble for himſelf, and be diſpoſed to pay humble homage, and unlimited ſubmiſſion to them.—Beſides, ſuppoſing a ſuperior tribunal to which you could appeal, how ſhould every private

private Chriſtian have acceſs to it, ſo as to ſtate his complaint and order his cauſe? Or, if he ſhould, how would this mend the matter? You cannot, without impiety, ſuppoſe this ſupreme court, to which you appeal, to conſiſt of laymen.—Embaſſadors of heaven ſubjected to the juriſdiction of common law, with regard to the exertion of their own powers;—horrid! This would be mingling heaven and earth together, and confounding every ſacred diſtinction.—And is it poſſible to bring yourſelf to think, that a court of *prieſts*, who had nothing to fear from any other quarter, would condemn a brother on your account;—whoſe very pretenſions to think and complain would appear a greater enormity, and more threatening to the common cauſe, than any thing that an Eccleſiaſtic could commit.

THIS may be thought undiſtinguiſhingly uncharitable;—but let the reader recollect that I am talking of mere *prieſts*, and then let him ſay, from fact and experience, in circumſtances that have approached neareſt to thoſe we have ſuppoſed, whether the general tenor of the craft hath greatly contradicted any thing here inſinuated? That there have been, and may be exceptions; and that Eccleſiaſtics who have maintained the ſame general principles have complained of their brethren, and would have been diſpoſed, by their natural temper, to purſue more gentle and lenient meaſures, is not denied. The leading tenets of *prieſts* may be received, by education, as firſt principles; and, where there is no diſpoſition to prompt inquiry, nor vigour of underſtanding to enable one to correct them,—may lodge in the ſame breaſt with ſoft affections and candour of ſoul. But this

is far from being the general caſe: for, from whatever peculiar prejudices, or circumſtances of education, the firſt principles may be imbibed, they are nouriſhed by a pride and haughtineſs of ſoul, equally jealous of an inquiry that would leſſen the importance of the character, and impatient of oppoſition. This obſervation is ſo much juſtified by fact, that whatever principles of humanity, benevolence, or even friendſhip, a *prieſt* may ſeem to poſſeſs in common with other men, or however calm and diſpaſſionate he may appear to be, the moment you touch the *ſhiboleth* of the craft, you perceive the cloud on his brow, and the ſtorm gathering, which, if you are imprudent or obſtinate enough to perſiſt, will overtake you, and if you do not make a ſeaſonable ſubmiſſion, moſt aſſuredly deſtroy you.

BUT ſtill it may be ſaid, that all this is merely chimerical; for how can any one be led to ſuppoſe, that men poſſeſſed of ſuch powers, would deny the juſt and lawful exerciſe of them?—We are fully perſuaded, that, if there were any truly poſſeſſed of ſuch powers; any real embaſſadors of heaven living upon earth, and delegated to act in the name, and by the authority of the Almighty—they could not. But we muſt reaſon from experience, not from a fictitious, but a real character; what thoſe aſſuming the character of embaſſadors from heaven have done, and conſequently what they may do in ſimilar circumſtances. Have they not laid the moſt powerful Princes in Chriſtendom;—have they not laid whole kingdoms under a ſpiritual interdict; and have they not extorted the moſt ignominious and humiliating conceſſions from the kings of the earth, in order to be reſtored

reſtored again to the immunities and privileges of the church? Hiſtory is full of examples of this kind, which clearly demonſtrate the genius of Eccleſiaſtic government, where it hath been at liberty to exert itſelf without controul — and what a timid pitiful creature man is under the influence of ſuperſtition and *prieſtcraft*. But had experience brought in a more favourable report than in fact it hath done, it is ſtill to be remembered, that power never fails to bring along with it a ſtrong temptation to abuſe it, and therefore ought never to be truſted with mortals without ſome certain remedy in the caſe of the violent and outrageous abuſe of it;—perhaps after every expedient that can poſſibly be deviſed, it will be found, that nothing can prove an abſolute ſecurity for the righteous and moderate uſe of power, but unerring wiſdom and goodneſs alone.—But the moſt dangerous of all power, is a power in religion, becauſe it is capable of the greateſt perverſion, and is attended with the moſt fatal conſequences.—Civil power hath ſometimes been uſed with moderation, where it hath been reſtrained by no law; and a political conſtitution may be ſo balanced, as to preſerve, in equal ſcales, the powers of the legiſlator and the privileges of the people. But a power in the hands of the Eccleſiaſtics is incapable of this equilibrium: it will always preponderate to *their* ſide, until it leave nothing on the other but a mere form. Nor is it difficult to account for this difference.—A power in religion, ſo far as it is ſuppoſed to extend, is truly a power from God.—A power from God naturally overawes the conſcience, and renders an appeal to every other tribunal impoſſible; and thus our underſtandings are abuſed, our moral powers are rendered incapable of

every

every exertion, and a door is opened for every impoſition.

ADMITTING, however, at preſent, that we could depend on theſe ghoſtly fathers, and reſt fully aſſured of their conſcientious diſcharge of this important truſt, there are certain circumſtances, wherein it would be impoſſible to have acceſs to one of theſe apoſtolic miniſters. This is no trifling conſideration. Let us ſee then how the caſe may ſtand.

THE Chriſtian Religion is not a mere local inſtitution like the Jewiſh, or carried on in a ſimilar manner, under an immediate and extraordinary diſpenſation of Providence. The external conſtitution of the Chriſtian Church reſts on the ſame bottom with the conſtitution of civil government, and muſt neceſſarily ſhare in the common fate of ſtates and nations. A Chriſtian country may be now happy in the ſmiles of a zealous orthodox prince, or ſupreme magiſtrate, and may be nouriſhed under the wings of the *Hierarchy*; ſo that "they ſhall ſit every man under his own fig-tree, and none ſhall make them afraid,"—with one of theſe *keepers* of the *ſeals* at his elbow. But alas, human affairs are fluctuating. This promiſing and delightful ſcene of church glory may darken in a moment. Some mighty unforeſeen cauſes may combine; the happy ſtate may be thrown into convulſions, and out of the alarming ferment a revolution may break forth. A heretical prince may mount the throne, who will not permit one *prieſt* to lodge within his dominions. The *ſucceſſors* of the Apoſtles may be hunted from one lurking place to another. They may be

be ſubjected to the moſt ſevere penal laws as deceivers of the people, and enemies to the ſacred and civil rights of mankind. The people themſelves may be laid under a civil interdict from holding communication with them. They may be all baniſhed, as the Jeſuits have been, as the diſturbers of the peace of kingdoms;—not one *divine legate* may remain to diſpenſe the Sacraments. A moſt wretched condition this!—And yet we can figure another as bad. A number of private Chriſtians, ſuppoſe in their migration to America, are thrown upon a deſolate iſland, or among Barbarians who never heard of ſo wonderful a character as a divine embaſſador; it is a thouſand to one if theſe unhappy men have been ſo prudent as to carry a ſon of Levi with them; likely enough it was impoſſible.—There is no remedy, the order of Providence muſt take place. They have neither biſhop nor preſbyter among them; they are undone. Sad indeed! But ſtay; perhaps they have been lucky enough to carry their bibles with them. It ſignifies not a ruſh. Is it not the original charter? True; but it is a charter without a ſeal. It cannot help them. They muſt periſh with the book of God in their hands.

"BUT theſe and all ſuch caſes, are caſes of neceſſity, and great allowances ought to be made—ſo great that the moſt bigotted *prieſt* dare not pronounce a deciſion." This will certainly be pleaded to elude conſequences neceſſarily reſulting from the geneneral doctrine of prieſts and ſacraments; but how juſtly, merits ſome conſideration—And, in the *firſt* place, it is aſked by what authority are theſe allowances fairly ſtated and determined? For if the ſame authority by which the efficacy of the ſacraments

ſacraments themſelves, and the excluſive right of adminiſtring them is aſcertained, doth not likewiſe ſtate and determine thoſe caſes of neceſſity, the neceſſity becomes abſolute. The fixed order of grace admits of no limitation. Let us take an example or two. "Without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God." "Repent and be converted that your ſins may be blotted out." "Follow—holineſs without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord." Theſe are unconditional propoſitions, whether on the ſyſtem of natural or revealed religion, without regard to time, place, or circumſtance: they may, therefore be called neceſſary to Salvation. "But they are in every ones power, which is not the caſe in thoſe inſtances you have ſo carefully marked." True, and this very conſideration demonſtrates the abſurdity of maintaining that the canonical adminiſtration of ſacraments is neceſſary to Salvation: for what is not in a chriſtian's power at all times, and in all places, cannot be neceſſary to Salvation. It may be uſeful, it may be deſirable, but it cannot be neceſſary. But *ſecondly*, the queſtion is not concerning allowances or abatements in caſes of neceſſity, but how the want of the ſacraments ſhall be ſupplied? How ſhall original ſin be waſhed away? Where are my ſeals of the covenant of grace? What ſhall I do thus deprived of my ſpiritual food? Theſe are deſperate ſpiritual wants; they muſt be ſupplied or I periſh.—It is fooliſh, therefore, to ſpeak of making allowances; for either ſome proviſion muſt be made by another channel, or the effects muſt take place in the eſtabliſhed order of things: that is, original ſin muſt remain unwaſhed away.—I muſt be left deſtitute of ſpiritual food—I can receive no ſeal of the covenant—I cannot eat the

fleſh,

fleſh, nor drink the blood of the Son of God, which alone can give a right to immortality. It is the ſame thing to me as if there had never been a covenant. "Hold, we do not pretend to limit the uncovenanted mercies of God." If it pleaſe your *reverences*, how far do theſe uncovenanted mercies extend? Do they actually comprehend our caſe? For if you can aſſure us of this, we are by no means diſpoſed to diſpute about words. "We cannot tell, but we can promiſe you nothing further." Good ſouls, we are mightily obliged to you for this diſcovery, that inſtead of being poſitively damned, we are only out of the way of ſalvation.—But permit us, if you pleaſe, to expoſtulate a little further, and to bring this matter nearer to a point if poſſible. Is not this covenant, of which you ſpeak, the declaration of the divine mercy, and the ſecurity on which it ſtands? And is not this mercy declared in a way moſt ſuitable to the divine perfections and the ſtate of the ſinner? It cannot be denied. Then the whole ſecret is out; where this covenant is declared, the bleſſings of it cannot be conferred in another way;—and what the plain import of this is, I forbear mentioning:—"tell it not in Gath, publiſh it not in the ſtreets of Aſkelon".

ANOTHER huge difficulty ariſes from this ſyſtem of prieſtcraft, and that is, by what infallible marks a private Chriſtian is to come at the knowledge of the truth, and to arrive at entire ſatisfaction amidſt contending parties.—One order of prieſts tells him, that there can be no church without a viſible head, the fountain of Eccleſiaſtic power and authority.—That this authority was originally committed by Chriſt to Peter, who again delegated

legated this ſpiritual juriſdiction to the *Pope* of Rome, and his *ſucceſſors* in office; and who, in their turn, parcel it out at pleaſure, to different orders of Eccleſiaſtics. Therefore, that the Church of Rome is the only true Church, that every ſociety on earth cut off from her communion calling themſelves a Church, and every one calling himſelf an Eccleſiaſtic belonging to it, — are ſchiſmatics, and *damned* heretics.——Another order, in return to this civility, pay the former the compliment of acknowledging, that the *Church* of Rome is a true Church, becauſe ſhe hath preſerved Apoſtolic ſucceſſion, and conſequently the validity of the Sacraments; that they hold from her their ordination, and all their miniſterial powers; but that being infected with many groſs errors, a reformation, and ſeparation from her, became neceſſary; that this reformation proceeded exactly on the plan of the Scriptures and primitive Chriſtianity.—Agreeably to which there is an Eccleſiaſtic polity eſtabliſhed, of which Biſhops are the higheſt in order, deriving their powers as ſucceſſors of the Apoſtles;—the inferior order deriving their miniſterial authority from them; that without this order, and this communication of miniſterial powers, there can be no Church;—therefore, that thoſe calling themſelves Preſbyterian or Independent Churches, being without Apoſtolic ordination, are without miſſion, without authority, without order, without Sacraments.—A third roundly affirms, that whether Pope or Biſhop, it is of ſmall importance, ſeeing both are equally uſurpers upon God's heritage, and the hierarchy, under every form, the *Whore* of *Babylon*—the *Antichriſt*—the *man* of *ſin*, who ſhall come with all deceivableneſs of unrighteouſneſs; therefore, that Eccleſiaſtic

cleſiaſtic government by Preſbyters is the true Apoſtolic form, and founded upon the purity of the primitive Church.

Now, how is a plain chriſtian to come at the bottom of theſe differing pretenſions? He has only one way in which he can poſſibly ſatisfy his mind — that the religion of Chriſt cannot reſt upon ſo doubtful and precarious a bottom.—We will even ſuppoſe that the ſcriptures had been more explicit, and had eſtabliſhed a fixed order of prieſthood veſted with all the powers which the moſt ambitious eccleſiaſtic can pretend to, would this have wholly cleared up the difficulty and enabled any ſenſible inquirer to judge with certainty? The contrary is the fact. We ſhould again be involved in a labyrinth from which it would be impoſſible for the greateſt part of chriſtians to extricate themſelves. It is now near eighteen hundred years ſince this order and ſucceſſion is ſuppoſed firſt to have taken place: and who will pretend to ſay that, amidſt ſo many revolutions of nations, ſo many political ſchemes, ſo many impoſitions of deſigning men, ſuch imperfect, and even contradictory accounts, he could trace this ſucceſſion through all its branches, ſo as to pronounce with aſſurance that this ſacred chain hath not been broken, and uſurpations made on the original eſtabliſhment. It may be ſaid, that it would have been impoſſible to have preſerved ſuch a chain without frequent and extraordinary interpoſitions of Providence. We may even defy all the prieſts on earth to produce evidence ſufficient to ſatisfy the judicious inquirer in what manner, by what miſſion, authority, or call, the firſt churches were furniſhed with paſtors — and if they could

trace

trace them one by one, and ſay who ordained this biſhop or preſbyter, and who ordained that, and by what authority a third was ſet a part to the miniſterial function, and ſo through the immenſe extent of the whole, it would be impoſſible to proceed downward with any certainty; the inveſtigation would, in the moſt favourable point of view be extremely difficult, and the concluſion doubtful.

SUCH are the conſequences that would neceſſarily ariſe from the chain of apoſtolic ſucceſſion which eccleſiaſtics have pretended to eſtabliſh — equally preſumptuous in itſelf, injurious to the moral character of the Deity, and inconſiſtent with the ſpirit of genuine Chriſtianity.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

SECT I.

WHAT THE GENERAL IDEA IMPORTS.

AS every one hath a right to inquire and judge perſonally, where the ſubject regards religion only; no national plan can be eſtabliſhed that binds individuals, without a manifeſt encroachment on that freedom of ſentiment which is eſſential to the very being of it. If, under pretence of this freedom, any one ſhall aſſume a right to act in oppoſition to thoſe laws or forms of political government, by which the undiſturbed exerciſe of religion itſelf is protected, he becomes amenable to the public tribunal as a diſorderly ſubject, and a rebel to the ſtate; the laws he tranſgreſſes being civil laws, formed and carried into execution without regard to religious differences of any kind.—But though the very being of religion depends upon freedom of inquiry, and a liberty of ſerving God agreeably to the dictates of conſcience; it will always be found, amidſt the utmoſt variety of opinions that can poſſibly happen, that a ſimilarity will ſo far prevail, as will unite men into ſocieties agreeing in common ſentiments, and one common mode of worſhip (ſee chap. III. ſect. 5.)—But neither thoſe ſen-

timents, nor this form, fall properly under the idea of Church Diſcipline; becauſe, independently of theſe, which are ſuppoſed to conſtitute their religious creed, the government of the ſociety will require the exerciſe of certain laws neceſſary for preſerving the external decencies, and the internal and moral order of it. This is the *diſcipline* of that ſociety; and the exerciſe of it belongs to the ſociety as ſuch,—to one or more authoriſed by them to diſcharge this part of the public truſt.

Now, theſe laws may derive their authority from diſtinct ſources, both binding on the ſociety from obligations correſponding to this authority.—The ſociety, if not reſtrained by, or in oppoſition to any divine law, in virtue of their own intrinſic powers, may agree upon what regulations may appear moſt ſubſervient to their own ideas of order and decency; and ſuch regulations with regard to the members perſonally agreeing, or that ſhall afterwards join the ſociety, are properly to be conſidered as terms of communion without ſubmiſſion to, or obſervance of which, they cannot enjoy the privileges of the ſociety.—But whatever regulations prudence, or a regard to the external decencies of religion may dictate; if it ſhall appear from the word of God, that there are any laws, rules, or directions that reſpect Chriſtians in general;—that reſpect the external or internal order to be obſerved in their religious aſſemblies, theſe, undoubtedly are univerſally binding, and claim the firſt regard. They do not exclude other regulations, but no human œconomy can ſuperſede the ſacred obſervance of them. It may be worth while, therefore, to inquire if there are any ſuch regulations in the New Teſtament,

what

what they are, and what is their nature or import? This is the more neceſſary, as Eccleſiaſtics, if I am not miſtaken, have aſſumed a power *here* likewiſe, which by no means belongs to them.

SECT. V.

OF THE SCRIPTURAL RULES ON THIS SUBJECT.

WHAT was the *Godly* diſcipline eſtabliſhed, in what is called the primitive church, or to what *pennance thoſe convicted of notorious crimes were put*, is of no importance in this queſtion; becauſe it ſeems to admit of little doubt, that in this, as well as in matters of greater importance, the primitive church aſſumed to themſelves powers and authority no where ſupported by the unerring ſtandard. We ſhall, therefore, here, as in the preceeding chapters, be directed wholly by the light of Scripture.

THE general rule of Scripture then is;—"Let all things be done decently and in order," which general rule immediately refers to an abuſe among the Corinthians,—of ſpeaking in their public aſſemblies in an unknown language, and that indiſcriminately, ſo that "every one had a pſalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation." This had introduced great confuſion among them, and had laid the foundation of juſt offence and ridicule, "if there come in thoſe that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not ſay that ye are mad?" "Let all things be done therefore for edification:" and again,

"Let all things be done decently and in order." This is the ſpecial application of the general rule by the Apoſtle himſelf; though it no doubt applies to every ſimilar caſe, and, in particular, hath the force of a ſtanding law againſt ſpeaking in an unknown tongue, or performing, at the ſame time, ſeparate duties in religious aſſemblies.

BESIDES this general rule, there are ſome directions for public admonition and cenſure no leſs general, "Wherefore rebuke them ſharply, that they may be ſound in the faith." "Them that ſin rebuke before all, that others may fear." From theſe it is ſufficiently plain, that public reproof is the indiſpenſible duty of the miniſters of religion, in caſes where any of the members of the ſociety, in which he preſides, have been guilty of ſins notoriouſly inconſiſtent with their profeſſion.—By the laws of Chriſtianity, ſuch members are as much ſubjected to open rebuke, as by the laws of civil government the tranſgreſſors of them are ſubjected to the penalty annexed; and if ſuch offenders ſhall refuſe to ſubmit, or ſhall perſiſt in their enormities, they are to be rejected, or cut off from the communion of the ſociety. This is agreeable to all the rules of decency and moral order, and particularly ſupported by the divine law, "but if he refuſe to hear the Church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican." "A man that is a heretic after the firſt and ſecond admonition reject, knowing, he that is ſuch is ſubverted, and ſins, being condemned of himſelf."—A heretic, in the Apoſtolic ſenſe, is an obſtinate ſinner, whom neither private nor public admonition can reclaim. He is one who acts

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in oppoſition to the dictates of his conſcience. He is ſelf-condemned without profiting by his convictions; and therefore ought to be publicly condemned, and diſmembered from the ſociety of which he hath rendered himſelf ſo unworthy.—Being an heretic may likewiſe include in it "making ſhipwreck concerning the faith;" maintaining and propagating errors ſubverſive of the very foundations of Chriſtianity;—"denying the Lord that bought them," which another Apoſtle calls damned hereſy; or, ſaying with Hymeneus and Philetus, "that the reſurrection is already paſt." But whether *theſe*, or other tenets are heretical, in a more general ſenſe, *that* may be called hereſy, with regard to any particular Chriſtian ſociety, which appears to them inconſiſtent with the purity of the faith, and the fundamental articles of their union: and, therefore, every ſuch ſociety is authoriſed to admoniſh, or reject, whatever member or members ſhall maintain doctrines in oppoſition to thoſe fundamental articles;—but they have no authority to proceed one ſtep further. No pains, no penalties, lie within their juriſdiction; nor are ſuch offenders accountable to any civil tribunal, but ſo far only as they have been guilty of vices, or have propagated errors hurtful to good government, and the ſecurity of the commonwealth.—That alliance between the *Church* and the State is the moſt dangerous of all unions, where there is an eſtabliſhed connection between hereſy and certain penal laws, and where the *Church* judges in the firſt place of the hereſy, and then commits the offender to the civil magiſtrate for execution. This hath been one of the moſt dreadful political meaſures of the *Church* of Rome,

equally injurious to the rights of private judgment and good policy.—Few will think it worth their while to inquire, and fewer will have reſolution to expoſe the errors of an eſtabliſhed ſyſtem where oppoſition and the ſtake are convertible terms.—The ſtate, under the deluſion of maintaining its own authority, deſtroys its moſt valuable ſubjects, and is the mere tool of Eccleſiaſtic tyranny.

IT may be thought that the apoſtolic injunction to the church at Corinth ſeems evidently to carry this matter higher. "For I verily as abſent in body, but preſent in ſpirit have judged already as though preſent concerning him that hath done this deed; in the name of the Lord Jeſus, when ye are aſſembled together and my ſpirit, with the power of the Lord Jeſus, to deliver ſuch a man to ſatan for the deſtruction of the fleſh, that the ſpirit may be ſaved in the day of the Lord Jeſus"—eſpecially as it is clearly confirmed by the Apoſtle's own practice, "of whom is Hymenœus and Alexander whom I have delivered over to Satan, that they might not blaſpheme." But how far doth the apoſtolic injunction, or his own ſentence carry this point? "From this double authority the church is certainly veſted with a power, not only of rejecting ſcandalous offenders, whether in practice or doctrine, but impoſing certain pennances upon them for the deſtruction of the fleſh." By no means.—Let us candidly weigh the import of the paſſage.

IN the *firſt* place this ſentence—"delivering to Satan for the deſtruction of the fleſh," is evidently of an extraordinary

ordinary nature. It carried its own execution in it, in the immediate infliction of certain bodily diſeaſes deſigned by Providence, in the infancy of Chriſtianity, —as a viſible declaration of the divine diſpleaſure againſt notorious offenders, as a confirmation of the authority of the apoſtolic deciſions, agreeable to the promiſe, "whatever ye bind in earth ſhall be bound in heaven," and as a proof and ſtanding warning to others in every ſimilar caſe. The ſame order of Providence is evident in the puniſhment of thoſe who had been guilty of a ſcandalous abuſe in partaking of the Lord's Supper. "For this cauſe many are weak and ſickly among you, and many are fallen aſleep." Beſides, this ſentence plainly ſuppoſes, in the very nature of it, a power over Satan, and of employing him as an inſtrument of puniſhment. It cannot, therefore be conſidered as a law to be obſerved, or a precedent to be followed in the ordinary courſe of diſcipline in the church of Chriſt. This is further confirmed from the following conſiderations— In the caſe before us there is an immediate interpoſition of the apoſtolic authority: though abſent in body, he was preſent in ſpirit. The ſentence was denounced as if perſonally preſent, and from his own mouth. "When ye are gathered together and my ſpirit—deliver ſuch a one to Satan." It was therefore an immediate apoſtolic action, and not a ſtated cenſure in virtue of any general rule or law—Becauſe the crime of the offender was of a heinous and ſimilar nature, He had his father's wife, a thing not named among the Gentiles— Should the ſame authority be pretended to, the very exerciſe of it would infallibly expoſe the preſumption of the claim: no eccleſiaſtic, nor order of eccleſiaſtic

being poſſeſſed of a power of employing Satan as an inſtrument of puniſhment—It muſt be acknowleged, however, to their honour, that they have never been wanting in expedients. If their power over Satan hath ceaſed, they have ſeldom failed, where another power was fairly lodged in ther hands, to employ his viſible agents in the *humane* office of deſtroying the fleſh to ſave the ſpirit.

UPON the whole, it ſeems ſufficiently clear from the New Teſtament, that the exerciſe of church diſcipline includes in it, and *only* includes in it ſuch regulations as regard the decencies of religion—the public admoniſhing once and again of offenders—and on their remaining obſtinate, rejecting them. Every thing beyond this is eccleſiaſtic tyranny.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

OF ABSOLUTION.

SECT. I.

OF THIS CLAIM IN GENERAL.

IT would appear from the general notions, that men entertain of pardon, that they conſider it as a mere arbitrary exerciſe of divine mercy. But ſuch an idea is utterly inconſiſtent with the nature of God as the moral governour, and the righteous Lord of the univerſe. Whatever God doth, he doth freely, but yet by an invariable law, which it would be as abſurd to ſuppoſe him to tranſgreſs, as to ceaſe to be. This law is the perfection and rectitude of his nature, by which he is ſo uniformly determined, that could we ſee the whole extent of his natural and moral government, it would appear one continued diſplay of it—Forgiveneſs of ſin, therefore, muſt include in it, not merely remitting the offence, and abſolution from puniſhment, but a change in the temper and diſpoſition of the offender; and this not merely ſubſequent, but antecedent to the act of forgiveneſs. In the order of Providence, ſomething muſt paſs in the mind that indicates a new temper, or otherwiſe forgiveneſs would be the mere arbitrary exerciſe

ciſe of power. To ſuppoſe that God ſhould pardon one obſtinately and wilfully continuing in ſin, would be to ſuppoſe him not only acting in oppoſition to his moral nature, but diſpenſing this privilege in vain; becauſe without a change in the mind of the perſon pardoned, he would nevertheleſs remain incapable of happineſs—Hence the Goſpel makes faith the abſolute pre-requiſite to this gracious diſpenſation: as thereby the ſoul diſcovers a deep ſenſe of its unworthineſs, a hearty ſorrow for ſin, and an unlimited ſubmiſſion to the terms of the Goſpel—Hence likewiſe it is evident that God only can forgive ſins: it being impoſſible that any created being ſhould be acquainted with the inward diſpoſitions of the human heart, or know its thoughts afar off.

OF all the extravagant and impious claims, therefore, which *prieſts* have made this of forgiving ſins is the moſt aſtoniſhing: and yet ſuch is the weakneſs and credulity of the human mind—and ſo effectually doth ſuperſtition deſtroy all its rational powers, that this doctrine was tamely received over the greateſt part of Europe for many centuries; and in the darkeſt regions of popery, where the light of liberal inquiry hath not yet penetrated the gloom, is ſtill believed—and perhaps, among the more ignorant and ſuperſtitious of that religion, in every country. At leaſt I have never known any of that claſs, who did not appear to lay great weight upon confeſſion and abſolution. And is it wonderful that they ſhould, who have drawn all their notions from their breviary and manuals, and who have ſo often experienced a falſe peace of conſcience from the ſuppoſed exerciſe of a power,

er, which they have been accuſtomed to conſider as one of the ſacred privileges of the Holy order?

BUT though this charge falls chiefly upon the Church of Rome, it is a queſtion whether proteſtant churches are wholly exempted from it.—For what account can be given of any form of abſolution whatever, which implies nothing on the part of him who pronounces it, or on the part of him that receives it? How ſhould ſuch an unmeaning form have entered into the head of any ſociety on earth? It muſt certainly, therefore, have been intended in ſome important point of view, but which I confeſs is difficult to be perceived, if the idea of pardon is not appended to it. For as a ſolemn declaration of the pardon promiſed in the goſpel to all that repent and believe, it can ſignify nothing. No one who thinks at all can be ſo weak as to be deceived by this account. Is the declaration of a prieſt more ſatisfying, or doth it carry more authority in it than the declaration of Chriſt and his Apoſtles? Was this declaration publiſhed in the goſpel of peace that all might take the benefit of it, and be encouraged by it; or was it left to the church, that the prieſthood for the peculiar honour of their office, might have the privilege of announcing the joyful tidings? What will not theſe men aſſume to themſelves?—"This is running away with declamation — proteſtant divines aſſume no commiſſion, no authoritative powers of pardoning ſin." I know many of them do not: but that ſuch a power hath been aſſumed, and is ſtill aſſumed is certain; or why is it publickly affirmed "That Chriſt Jeſus hath left power to his Church to abſolve all ſinners who truly repent and believe." If there be nothing here

here further intended than the ſimple declaration of the goſpel, why is it ſaid to be a power left to the church? And why doth the prieſt add "by *his* authority committed to me, I abſolve thee from all thy ſins?" In the general commiſſion ſaid to be given by Chriſt Jeſus to the Church the proper limitation is added "who truly repent and believe," but in the particular application by the prieſt to the perſon abſolved, there is no ſuch limitation — he is *ſimpliciter* abſolved from all his ſins. This limitation, it will be ſaid, is underſtood, and I will not pretend to ſay it is not: but I appeal to every man of ſenſe and candour, who is acquainted with the ſuperſtition that prevails among the lower claſs, if there be not ſomething *here*, that muſt unavoidably lead ſuch to think, that this is an authoritative deed accompanied with ſome peculiar efficacy, as diſtinguiſhed from the declarations of pardon in the goſpel to ſinners in general. For my own part I confeſs I never could perceive the meaning of this form, as a part of a public religious office; and would be glad to ſee it explained upon rational, proteſtant, and chriſtian principles. The claim of the Romaniſts is known: they ſpeak out plainly: but, while proteſtants profeſs to reject this claim, why ſhould they retain, and ſeem to put a diſtinguiſhed value upon any form in their religious ſervice that leaves ground for the moſt diſtant ſuſpicions againſt themſelves? It may not be unacceptable, perhaps, to ſome readers to examine ſhortly into the foundations of this claim as it regards the Church of Rome: if there are any ſimilar pretenſions, they muſt ſtand or fall together.

SECT.

SECT. II.

CONCERNING THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH THIS CLAIM RESTS.

HOW far, on particular occaſions and for wiſe and important reaſons, God may ſee fit to diſcover the hidden things, even of the hearts of other men; or how far he may communicate to men ſuch a power over life and death, as he did with regard to both in the caſe of Ananias and Saphira, we do not pretend to determine. But a power of forgiving ſins, much more a ſtanding delegation of this power to any man or order of men, appears in its own nature incommunicable. Almighty God aſſumes it as his peculiar prerogative; "I even I am he that blotteth out tranſgreſſion." "And the Lord deſcended in the cloud and proclaimed the name of the Lord—the Lord God forgiving iniquity, tranſgreſſion, and ſin." As it is repugnant to all our ideas of the Divinity, it is no leſs inconſiſtent with our nature and faculties, which cannot poſſibly extend to a continued knowledge of the thoughts, imaginations, and purpoſes of others, without which, as hath been obſerved, in the former ſection, forgiveneſs would be the mere exerciſe of arbitrary power.

IT ſeems, therefore, more than doubtful, whether the powers committed to Peter, or to the other Apoſtles, of *binding* and *looſing*, are to be underſtood of the forgiveneſs of ſin. I do not find one inſtance in Scripture where the words are uſed in this ſenſe: nor doth the occaſion on which the promiſe was given ſeem to lay a foundation

foundation for ſuch an interpretation.—In the firſt inſtance, our Lord being led from Peter's confeſſion to ſpeak of his Church, or the future eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity which he ſhould raiſe upon it, adds, "and I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatſoever thou ſhalt bind on earth ſhall be bound in heaven, and whatſoever thou ſhalt looſe on earth ſhall be looſed in heaven."—Now what is here that ſhould lead to the idea of forgiving ſins? Is it not evident to every reader of the New Teſtament, that by the kingdom of heaven, in moſt of Chriſt's diſcourſes and parables, his Church and Spiritual Kingdom are to be underſtood? "Go preach, ſaying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." By the keys, therefore, of the kingdom of heaven, is plainly meant the ſtewardſhip of the myſteries of the Goſpel of Chriſt. This is confirmed by the Apoſtle's account of his own office, "let a man ſo account of us as miniſters of Chriſt, and ſtewards of the myſteries of God." The Apoſtles were the ſtewards in Chriſt's houſehold;—the keys of doctrine, of diſcipline, and of every Chriſtian inſtitution, were put into their hands; and as they were directed in all things relative to their office by an unerring ſpirit, whatever they did was approved of by heaven; and, in a particular manner, admitting or rejecting members of Chriſtian communion.

THIS account is ſtill further ſupported by a ſimilar promiſe of our Lord's to his Apoſtles in general, "whatſoever ye ſhall bind on earth ſhall be bound in heaven, and whatſoever ye ſhall looſe on earth ſhall be looſed in heaven;" where the context plainly indicates a re-

a reference to thoſe cenſures by which the Church of Chriſt is empowered to reject, and avoid the ſociety of obſtinate offenders; "but if he refuſe to hear the Church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican;"—as one cut off from the ſociety of the faithful;—and conſequently determines the ſenſe of what follows: "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, whatſoever ye ſhall bind on earth ſhall be bound in heaven, and whatſoever ye ſhall looſe on earth ſhall be looſed in heaven." This ſentence of rejection againſt an offending brother ſhall be confirmed or bound upon him in heaven; and, upon his ſubmiſſion and repentence, the ſentence being looſed on earth, and he reſtored again to the privileges of Chriſtianity, it ſhall be looſed in heaven, and his re-admiſſion receive the divine approbation. This explication appears by no means forced, but to ariſe from the juſt connection of the words, and therefore may be properly conſidered as a key to every ſimilar promiſe;—ſuch, in particular, as that to the Apoſtles, "whoſe ſins ye remit, ſhall be remitted unto them, and whoſe ſins ye retain, they ſhall be retained."—Nor is the difference of expreſſion material; for that ſentence which cut off an obſtinate offender from the privileges of Chriſtian communion, bound upon him, beyond all doubt, the ſin included in that offence, and for the ſame reaſon, reſtoring him to thoſe privileges, upon repentance, looſed him from this ſin.—It doth not appear, therefore, that there were any general powers given even to the Apoſtles of forgiving ſins. There are two conſiderations which add ſtrength to this concluſion:—That the Apoſtles did exerciſe this power of diſcipline, and their ſentence was bound in heaven by the viſible interpoſition

tion of Providence in the *deſtruction of the fleſh*.—They did not exerciſe this power of forgiving ſins, ſo far as there appears any evidence from the divine record. They hold up the terms of the Goſpel, and call upon men to faith and repentance, leaving the event wholly to God. There is not one inſtance of an Apoſtolic abſolution in all the New Teſtament.

BUT, now, if we ſhould admit that the Apoſtles were poſſeſſed of this power, what is this to Eccleſiaſtics? Doth it appear that they ever delegated this power to any order of Church Officers? It will, no doubt be anſwered in the affirmative, and the injunction of the Apoſtle James will be quoted in proof of it. "Is any man ſick among you? let him call for the Elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith ſhall ſave the ſick, and the Lord ſhall raiſe him up, and if he have committed ſins they ſhall be forgiven him." As it muſt be acknowledged that theſe words have a plauſible appearance, and might be apt to miſlead a ſuperficial inquirer, they deſerve ſome notice.

AND, *firſt*, it ought here to be particularly attended to, that the words are wholly confined to the caſe of ſickneſs. "Is any man *ſick*, let him call for the Elders of the Church." This *ſpeciality* puts it beyond all doubt, that the forgiveneſs ſpoken of, in the caſe before us, cannot poſſibly imply a general and indefinite power committed to thoſe Elders. But, *ſecondly*, it ſtill remains a queſtion if this *ſpeciality*, even includes in it properly the pardon of ſin; or is not rather to be underſtood in that particular ſenſe in which it occurs in other parts

parts of ſcripture, namely, for the recovery of the ſick perſons; where the cauſe, by a common figure, is put for the effect.

To explain this, it will be neceſſary to obſerve that the Jews entertained a notion that bodily diſeaſes and diſorders, as well as ſignal judgments were the effect of particular ſins committed by the perſon afflicted, or remarkably puniſhed in the order of Providence. "And Jeſus anſwering ſaid unto them, ſuppoſe ye that theſe Galileans were ſinners above all other Galileans, becauſe they ſuffered ſuch things? or theſe eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and ſlew them, think ye that they were ſinners above all men that dwelt in Jeruſalem? I tell you nay." From this it appears evident what their notions were concerning divine judgments. Again, "And his diſciples aſked him ſaying, maſter, who did ſin, this man or his parents that he was born blind? Here it is no leſs evident that they conſidered this blindneſs as the immediate puniſhment of ſin committed either by the man's parents or himſelf in ſome pre-exiſtent ſtate, agreeably to the Pythagorean notion with which it would appear our Lord's diſciples were tainted. The Phariſees ſeem to have entertained the ſame opinion of his caſe. "They ſaid unto him (the man who had been born blind) thou waſt altogether *born in thy ſins*, and doſt thou teach us? and they caſt him out"—To derive weight from their own prejudices, Jeſus argues with them in direct conformity to this idea. "When Jeſus ſaw their faith, he ſaith unto the ſick of the palſy, thy ſins be forgiven thee: but

there were certain of the ſcribes ſitting there, and reaſoning in their own hearts, why doth this man thus ſpeak blaſphemy? who can forgive ſins but God only? And immediately when he perceived in his ſpirit that they reaſoned within themſelves, he ſaid unto them why reaſon ye theſe things in your hearts? whether is it eaſier to ſay to the ſick of the palſy, thy ſins be forgiven thee, or to ſay ariſe take up thy bed and walk? but that ye may know that the Son of Man hath *power to forgive ſins*, he ſaith to the ſick of the palſy, *take up thy bed*." From this whole paſſage it appears with the cleareſt evidence that by forgiving the ſins of the ſick of the palſy, our Lord underſtood healing him, ſeeing he makes forgiving his ſins, and taking up his bed to ſignify the ſame thing. Beſides, it is evident from the ſtory as narrated by three Evangeliſts, that this forgiveneſs did not regard the ſick perſon's ſins in general, but thoſe ſins which according to the idea of the Jews on this ſubject, might be conſidered as the cauſe of this particular diſeaſe: for "when he ſaw *their* faith"—the faith of thoſe who brought him, "he ſaith unto the ſick of the palſy, thy ſins be forgiven thee." But why *thy* ſins? It was *their* faith that our Lord ſaw, and were not *they all* equally ſinners who ſtood in need of pardon? no doubt they were: and the reſolution evidently ſhows that this forgiveneſs immediately regarded what was peculiar in the caſe of the ſick perſon—his diſeaſe and the cure of it. —This forgiveneſs, therefore, did not extend to a general pardon, but is by the context and our Lord's particular application reſtricted to the ſick of the palſy taking up his bed.

IT may occur to ſome, perhaps, that Jeſus by theſe words "whether is it eaſier to ſay to the ſick of the palſy, thy ſins be forgiven thee, or to ſay take up thy bed and walk" intended to point at the abſurdity of not admitting, that one who could heal diſeaſes, could likewiſe pardon ſin. But this interpretation cannot be received: becauſe a power of healing diſeaſes, even on ſome occaſions of raiſing the dead, by no means includes in it a power of pardon. The Jews could have brought examples from their own hiſtory of the former, but none of the latter. This argument, therefore, could have had no weight with them. It would have been utterly inconcluſive,—ſo that in every point of view "thy ſins be forgiven thee" muſt be limited to the recovery of the ſick perſon.—From all this we are led, upon the moſt probable principles, to conclude, that in the text quoted from James, the words, "and if he hath committed any ſins they ſhall be forgiven him" are preciſely of the ſame import with the words that go before, "and the Lord ſhall raiſe him up:" and are entirely ſimilar to the expreſſions of our Lord—"Thy ſins be forgiven thee," "Take up thy bed and walk." Both caſes are obviouſly opened by the ſame key.

But take it in what ſenſe you pleaſe, the caſe is extraordinary, and by no means applicable to the general ſtate of Chriſtianity. Ten thouſand rivers of *oil*, and the prayers of all the prieſts on earth are not ſufficient to work one cure of this kind. The cure may be affected in the order of Providence, or by the uſe of natural means; but they dare not pretend that by anointing

with oil and the efficacy of their prayers "the Lord *shall* raise up the sick." And where the effects have ceased, we may demonstratively conclude that the power is no more.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

OF CHRISTIAN TEACHERS.

SECT. I.

OF THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH THIS CHARACTER RESTS.

THOUGH, in the very introduction to this inquiry, the author, it is hoped, will appear, to the attentive reader, to have precluded every objection againſt his deſign as unfriendly to the miniſters of religion;—ſtill ſuſpicions may remain with ſome, that his reaſoning is chiefly formed to ſet aſide this order of men altogether, with whom the religious concerns of mankind are ſo inſeparably connected, that, without them, a ſenſe of divine things would quickly languiſh, if not be wholly eraſed from the human mind. And it may be aſked, by way of ridicule, who theſe miniſters of religion are, by what criterion they are to be diſtinguiſhed, and for what end they ſerve? "You have given us to underſtand, that the claim to Apoſtolic ſucceſſion is equally falſe and preſumptuous,—the impoſition of *lying prieſts*; that laying on of hands is a rite neither peculiar to miniſterial ordination, nor accompanied with any extraordinary efficacy; that the adminiſtration of the ſacraments doth not depend on the one, or the other; and

that all the privileges of the Church of Chriſt are the privileges of common Chriſtianity, and properly belong to Chriſtian communion.—What order then do theſe miniſters of religion hold, and upon what foundation do they ſtand? Have all equally a right to be miniſters of religion, or what conſtitutes the difference? Of what importance are they to ſociety, and what is their leading and diſtinguiſhing character?"

To theſe queſtions he will give the beſt anſwer he can, and, he flatters himſelf, a ſatisfactory one to thoſe who, void of prepoſſeſſions, ſearch for the truth, and are diſpoſed to conſult the Scriptures and their own underſtanding.—And his anſwer is this: Every one hath not equally a right to be a miniſter of religion, becauſe every one is neither poſſeſſed of the proper qualifications nor call.—That, though this character, in the ordinary diſpenſations of Providence, ſtands on the common foundation of religion itſelf, whether natural or revealed, ſo far as it is a public inſtitution neceſſary to promote the happineſs of mankind; to limit the adminiſtration of the public offices of it to a certain order of men, as a point of order and diſcipline, in formed religious ſocieties, appears not only uſeful but neceſſary.—That the adminiſtrator, therefore, of every public religious act in which the ſociety unite, but which, on account of this external order, or to render it a common action, muſt be performed by one, is a *miniſter* of religion *authoriſed* to exert the duties of his office by tacit agreement, in virtue of a plan antecedently eſtabliſhed by common edification, or by the immediate and particular choice of a Chriſtian community.

To

To explain this account a little more fully, let it be obſerved, that there is a wide difference between affirming, that certain rights belong to ſociety as ſuch, and that theſe rights belong to every individual. The right of magiſtracy, with all the departments, offices, and forms, that tend to conſtitute a well regulated ſtate, belong to ſociety, and is one of its natural and eſſential rights; but it doth not from thence follow, that every man is at liberty to aſſume the ſupreme power, or that the many inferior ſtations, and offices, neceſſary to compleat the various gradations of civil œconomy, lie at the diſcretion of every individual: and yet it is certainly true, thoſe caſes excepted, where Providence may evidently and ſignally interpoſe, antecedently to the choice of the community, or independently of their conſent, tacit or expreſſed; no man poſſeſſes a preference but what ariſes from conſiderations of ſuperior wiſdom, courage, virtue, or, in general, ſome one talent of being more extenſively uſeful; and even theſe are qualities of which he is not to ſtate himſelf a judge: the ſociety, either by the majority of voices, or ſome eſtabliſhed plan of procedure, are the final judges, and can alone veſt him with the proper authority.—The ſame reaſoning holds exactly in religion, with regard to adminiſtration, precedency, and every public and ſocial duty performed in the name of the ſociety, which muſt be transferred to one, and may be transferred without hurting the perſonal rights of individuals: —Rights which were antecedently common, ſo that no one, by any poſitive law, could claim a preference, by all the laws of decency, propriety, and reaſon, may be tranſferred from the many to one, who from that moment

acts by lawful authority; by a right that may properly be called his own; becauſe, while it remains in him, he poſſeſſes the power of the ſociety, and the ſociety act by him.

As the common right which the ſociety thus transfer conſtitutes this public right,—it is divine: for the rights of the ſociety, whether civil or religious, being a part of the divine inſtitution, either natural or moral, whoever is empowered by them, holds a truſt from God: he is the miniſter of God for their good, while he is engaged in the faithful diſcharge of it. But he holds no excluſive right;—no ſociety being at liberty to entruſt powers for the public good or edification, which they are not authoriſed, and ought not, to recal when they ceaſe to anſwer that end; when he or they who receive the truſt, become unworthy of it, or incapable of diſcharging it.—The all-wiſe and all-gracious Lord, in the conſtitution of his government, conſults the general happineſs of his rational creation,—if they would only learn to conſult their own. He gives to no mortal a power which they may abuſe without controul, at the expence of the civil or religious rights of mankind. If they will wantonly throw away their own rights, they muſt ſuffer for their folly, and are accountable to him.

THERE is one thing, however, that ought to be carefully attended to in this illuſtration from civil government—That, as members of civil ſociety, our wants, whether real or artificial, being more various, our relations and dependence more diverſified, and the objects of our purſuits, and the gratification of our paſſions interfering

interfering more with one another—political government doth not eaſily admit of little ſocieties chequered into one another, and regulated by different laws and modes of adminiſtration. Such ſocieties would naturally uſurp upon one another, till ſuperior policy or power had enabled one or more to ſubject the reſt to their juriſdiction, to extend their boundaries, and to eſtabliſh a more general ſyſtem of laws. Thus civil ſociety would go on by new acceſſions of dominion, forming itſelf into larger diſtricts and ſtates, till a reciprocal jealouſy had taken place, and formed a political balance ſufficient to preſerve the weak from falling a ſacrifice to the more powerful; ſo that it ſhould become difficult or hazardous to attempt further encroachments. But with regard to religious concerns the caſe becomes quite different, as hath in part been explained (Chap 3d.) The number of ſocieties differing from one another, or the number of which thoſe ſocieties are compoſed makes no difference *here*; becauſe in fact they have no more dependence upon one another than a Briton hath upon a Californian. Nothing but a ſpirit of *prieſtcraft* and eccleſiaſtic uſurpation could lead any one in religious concerns, to oppoſe, or give the ſmalleſt diſturbance to another. While men differ in opinions, which, without doing violence to our rational faculties, can never become uniform, as they are ſuppoſed to aim at the ſame common end, they ought to bear with one another, and to love one another—No doubt, if our views were more extenſive, our inquiries more impartial, and our prejudices and paſſions leſs violent; if education and particular circumſtances, which it were difficult to explain, did not conſpire to pervert our underſtandings, and obſtruct the knowlege

of

of the truth, the ſyſtem of chriſtians would be more uniform, and more conſiſtent—And a happy time may come when all men ſhall be of "one heart and of one mind in the Lord:" but till ſuch a wiſhed for period, all the external order in religion that ought to be looked for is, that every chriſtian community, profeſſing to unite in common principles, act conſiſtently with themſelves, conſiſtently with the order of ſociety, and without aſſuming a dominion over the conſciences of others.

IT will poſſibly be urged by ſome even who imagine they are free from every tincture of prieſtcraft—That it would be abſurd to conſtitute thoſe who themſelves ſtand in need of teaching, judges of their own teachers. In anſwer to this, it is aſked, doth civil government ſuppoſe every individual poſſeſſed of talents capable of judging with propriety of the qualifications of the Supreme Magiſtrate? Certainly: yet upon the principles of real liberty, and agreeably to the unalienable rights of human nature, it ought not to be departed from, that this right doth remain in the collective body, and that thoſe who diſcharge the office of magiſtracy exert every power in virtue of it either formally, or virtually ceded to them. Every receſſion from this capital point is a ſtep towards civil tyranny—The argument is entirely ſimilar with regard to public teachers. Though individuals may be incompetent judges of the qualifications neceſſary for the diſcharge of this office; in every chriſtian community in their collective capacity, their is a right, however they may abuſe it, of chuſing a public teacher in the exerciſe of which they may act as appears moſt ſubſervient to the ends of order and edification.

If

If they have not this right, to whom doth it belong? Who hath a power over their conſciences, to controul their choice, and ſay you ſhall not be directed by your own judgment? Human laws have no juriſdiction here, and if there be any divine law that reſtrains our chriſtian liberty let it be pointed out—Beſides, as in every civil ſociety there are always ſome of ſuperior abilities and wiſdom, who, without aiming at authority, or aſſuming over the underſtandings of others, acquire reſpect and influence, and are conſulted on every important event, ſo that they may be ſaid to direct the majority, though voluntarily and by their own choice; it will ſeldom, if ever, happen, that in a religious community there are not likewiſe a few who, by their diſtinguiſhed knowlege and piety, have acquired a general confidence, and by whom the ſociety chuſe to act.

THERE is one conſideration ſtill behind that entirely removes this objection—That veſting a chriſtian ſociety with the power of election, doth not ſtate them as abſolute judges of qualifications anticedently: becauſe, in every chriſtian community, where there is any ſenſe of propriety and fitneſs, beſides general rules, agreeably to which alone, one can aſſume the character of a public teacher—certain judges are appointed, by the very conſtitution of the ſociety, who, in the laſt inſtance take trial of the qualifications of candidates. This hath been the manner, and probably will continue to be the manner in all well-regulated chriſtian ſocieties. And it will no doubt happen that, according to the ſtrict obſervance of thoſe rules, and the capacity, piety, and attention of thoſe judges, licentiates for the miniſtry will

will be more or leſs deſerving and uſeful—But it ought to be carefully obſerved, that qualifications are one thing, and a right to preſide in a chriſtian ſociety quite another, (ſee Chap. 5. Sect. 3.) Theſe two ought never to be confounded—and in this lies the great ſecret of chriſtian liberty.

IT is not meant, by any thing here ſuggeſted, that the civil government hath not a right to eſtabliſh a religious polity ſo far, as its public inſtitutions do not appear inconſiſtent with the genius of chriſtianity in general, or any divine law in particular; that agreeably to this they may not appoint miniſters properly qualified, with benefices as public rewards of their labours. But in doing of this, every wiſe ſtate will conſult the diſpoſitions and religious opinions of a people, if theſe are not hurtful to good order, and the principles on which the civil conſtitution reſts—The reaſon is obvious: the more the people are knit to the religious eſtabliſhment, their political affections, and their attachments to religion, and its miniſters will be inſenſibly blended together, and become the joint ſecurity and ſtrength of the ſtate. But if the miniſters of the conſtitution ſhall become merely nominal; if the people are wholly alienated from them, their opinions, their mode of government and worſhip; as the benefices, originally intended to reward talents employed for the promotion of virtue and public happineſs, will remain in the hands of thoſe who contribute nothing to either—the ſtate, at the ſame time, will become more feeble by loſing one effectual handle of managing the people: for a mere protection of the civil powers, though in itſelf a great bleſſing, will not operate ſo powerfully on the affecti-

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ons as the ſecurity of an eſtabliſhment, and the ſweets of a public reward. Whatever meaſures, therefore a ſtate may be engaged to adopt, that drives the bulk of its ſubjects from the public teachers to look out for miniſters of their own, will be found in the iſſue, to be, at beſt, but bad policy—nor can it poſſibly reflect honour on the public teachers themſelves to be deſerted by the whole body the people, and to hold the public rewards while they contribute nothing to the public good. If ever this ſhould happen, it would be ſuch a proſtitution of the public funds, as would not be long tolerated under good government.—The nominal teachers would, inevitably, in the iſſue, fall a ſacrifice. The ſame policy that dictated the original eſtabliſhment, would naturally be directed to throw the public rewards into the hands of thoſe who had acquired the affections of the people: it being undoubtedly the wiſdom of government to eaſe the public of a tax, not only conſiſtently with the intereſt of the ſtate, but evidently ſubſervient to it.—But, if inſtead of a public eſtabliſhment, whereby a certain order of public teachers are ſupported and encouraged, at the ſame time that the people are left to their own choice, the ſtate ſhould, at any time, by penal laws, pretend to bind the people to the miniſtry of certain paſtors, to whom a particular diſtrict is committed:—the conſequence muſt infallibly be, the total ſubverſion of civil and religious liberty, or the recovery of both, by ſome important revolution in government.

SECT.

SECT. II.

OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHARACTER OF A PUBLIC TEACHER.

THE importance of any inſtitution to mankind is to be eſtimated from the nature and tendency of the end it is deſigned to promote, and from its immediate and neceſſary connection with that end. If the end is of no real or laſting benefit to public or private happineſs, ſhould the means appear the beſt that have been yet deviſed, the human underſtanding, however, ſeemingly ingeniouſly employed, and whatever ardor or zeal it may manifeſt, is, at beſt, but entertained about trifles, which may occupy and amuſe little minds, but can never ſhow its real vigour and uſefulneſs.—But if the end is confeſſedly of great importance, the only inquiry is, how far the means are neceſſary and adequate to it. The firſt queſtion, therefore, comes to be, whether Chriſtianity is of real importance to mankind? A queſtion that will be readily anſwered in the affirmative: for however men may have been led to differ in their accounts of the Chriſtian Religion, ariſing from the different iſſue of their own inquiries, but more frequently from the different repreſentations that theologians have given of it; it may be affirmed, in the general, that no real friend to natural religion, and to thoſe duties on which the happineſs of ſociety, and our hopes as reaſonable and accountable creatures depend, but muſt of neceſſity admit, that the Religion of Chriſt contains in it a ſyſtem of moral duties immediately ariſing from our relation

relation to one another, and our relation to the great Author of our exiſtence, more plain, more perfect, and more adapted to the feelings of the human mind than any other yet made known to the world. It is not my purpoſe, however, to enter into this argument at preſent. There is no occaſion for touching upon it, but as it introduces the next queſtion by which this part of our ſubject is chiefly illuſtrated.

IF Chriſtianity is of real importance to mankind, whether it is, of itſelf, poſſeſſed of internal powers to work its own way, and gain upon the minds of men without any ſubſidiary aids—without the aids of preaching and public inſtruction? To this it will, perhaps, be anſwered by ſome, that it certainly is poſſeſſed of ſuch powers; that to ſuppoſe otherwiſe would neceſſarily throw this reflection on its Divine Author—that he either wanted the power or the will to give execution to his own plan. But ſuch an anſwer, we apprehend, ought by no means to be admitted. Neither the plainneſs nor importance of the principles or precepts of Chriſtianity are ſufficient to preſerve them from corruption and decay, being totally perverted, or wholly overlooked, without a continued energy of Divine Power ſufficient to fix the attention, and counterwork the prejudices of the human mind. Nothing could have been more ſimple and obvious, we are naturally led to think, than the original law of nature. It was doubtleſs, the tranſcript of the Divinity on the mind of man: the intimations of his will in legible characters written upon his conſcience: yet this original ſignature itſelf proved inſufficient to preſerve clear and permanent impreſſions.

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In order, therefore, to reſtore and enforce a ſenſe of natural religion, and original obligation, God raiſed up an eminent preacher of righteouſneſs to the antediluvian world, and afterwards Abraham to whom he made himſelf known. And, in different periods, ſignal and illuſtrious preachers and patterns of virtue have appeared as light ſhining in a dark place: but being neither veſted with any public authority, or wholly purified themſelves from groſs errors in ſpeculation, nor ſufficiently fortified againſt giving way to prevailing idolatry and ſuperſtition in practice—their lectures too refined, and little adapted to vulgar underſtandings, were attended with no laſting benefit. Or if they were retained in the cloſets of a few ſelect philoſophers, their profeſſed ſcholars or admirers, and who endeavoured to improve upon them, they became ſtill more raiſed above the ordinary comprehenſion, by being wholly converted into an abſtract ſcience little connected with the feelings of the human heart. Some exceptions there are—men of attention to the human frame, and to the ſtate of man, and whoſe writings, no doubt, have been of great ſervice in preſerving a ſenſe of Deity and Morals. Theſe were the miniſters of natural religion, raiſed up to preſerve the world from total corruption and darkneſs. It may be thought, perhaps, that the ſmall influence of natural religion hath been chiefly owing to its not having been committed to writing; that, through the ſtrength of the paſſions, and the unavoidable effect of ſenſible objects upon the mind, the ſtrongeſt impreſſions wear out; and, through the imperfection of tradition, the cleareſt diſcoveries are loſt; but that the Chriſtian Religion is expoſed to none of theſe draw-backs: it having

having been committed to writing by the Evangeliſts and Apoſtles themſelves, and from the period of its publication having remained a ſtanding and authenticated record: and more eſpecially, by the diſcovery of the art of printing, among other important advantages, it having been widely diffuſed, and put into the hands of almoſt every individual. All this muſt be acknowledged; and that in theſe reſpects Chriſtianity hath evidently the advantage of the religion of nature, whether we aſcribe its origin to revelation, or certain radical impreſſions upon the human mind. An authentic public record remains a ſtandard to which we can appeal, and, amidſt the greateſt ignorance and perverſion, may prove the means of recovering the knowledge of the truth, by enabling us to ſeparate with certainty between it, and thoſe errors that ſeem twiſted with it, or grafted into it —or maintained in direct oppoſition. This effect it is fitted to produce, it hath often produced in a leſſer degree, but in our reformation from popery in a ſignal manner. If Eccleſiaſtics, after eſtabliſhing their heterogeneous ſyſtem of Paganiſm and Chriſtianity, ſo politically blended together, and ſo artfully contrived to enſnare the conſciences of mankind, had been able to have deſtroyed the original record, ſo that not one copy of it ſhould have remained, nor any thing further of its contents than was to be gathered from public articles, and the deciſions of councils; they might at this day have been abſolute Lords of Europe, with the honour of being the prieſts of a theology, the moſt extraordinary that ever human invention put together. The Scriptures, therefore, by being a permanent and uniform ſtandard, it muſt be acknowledged, become of more general and

laſting benefit than the moſt perfect ſyſtem of natural religion; but it is evident, from the amazing encroachments of the Church of Rome, from the unſcriptural tenets of many Proteſtants, from the oppoſite and contradictory ſyſtems of different religious ſects, ſome of which are replete with the wildeſt enthuſiaſm, and the groſſeſt conceptions of the deity, that they are by no means an abſolute ſecurity againſt abuſe.

BUT how far is public inſtruction fitted to prevent this effect? This is the capital point. And it is urged on the negative;—That public teaching is the very ſource of the evil of which we complain, and, therefore, can never prove the cure of it;—That hereby the vanity of the preacher is gratified in diſplaying his own talents, and propagating his own opinions;—That from this abuſe of the pulpit have ſprung thoſe endleſs ſects, and all that diverſity and oppoſition of ſentiments that have expoſed the cauſe of Chriſtianity and weakened its credit;—That the only teaching allowable, is reading the Scriptures in public without any comment, leaving them to their free courſe and operation;—That this, therefore, with the other public offices of religion, ſhould conſtitute the whole work of a miniſter. This may appear to ſome highly plauſible, and, therefore, deſerves ſome conſideration. I beg leave to offer a few remarks upon it.

AND, *firſt*, I would obſerve, that ſuppoſing this originally would have been a wiſe and neceſſary inſtitution; that ſuch a regulation, univerſally eſtabliſhed, and faithfully adhered to, from the commencement of Chriſtianity

Chriſtianity downwards, would have prevented the riſe of all thoſe ſects and opinions that have unhappily divided, and ſtill divide the Chriſtian world;—it is now too late. What is a proper ſecurity againſt an evil, and what is neceſſary to counteract its effects, are things totally diſtinct. Could you bring all Chriſtendom to agree in ſetting aſide public teaching, and confining miniſters to ſimple reading of the Scriptures, which, I apprehend, would be a matter of ſome difficulty,—the evil is already ſpread; already hath the human mind exhauſted all its wildneſs and luxuriancy both in broaching and propagating opinions. The queſtion, therefore, is not whether public teaching ought to have been originally admitted as an inſtitution fitted for the advancement of Chriſtianity; but whether it is now neceſſary? whether errors, propagated publicly, ought not to be publicly guarded againſt and expoſed? Beſides, this argument, if it is of any weight, goes too far, and upon the ſame foundation muſt condemn every commentary on the Scriptures, and all writings on religion: for, beyond all doubt, if theſe are allowable; if it ſerve, in any point of view, the intereſts of Virtue and Chriſtianity, to explain the ſacred volume, to reaſon, to admoniſh, and to employ all the arts of humen eloquence to enforce the ſeveral doctrines and precepts of religion; it is no leſs proper to explain the Scriptures and to preach in public.—It were ſurely in the higheſt degree abſurd to permit the one and reſtrain the other.—"But thouſands hear that never read, and ſpeak pertinently in public who never write books; and, therefore, in the one caſe more miſchief may be done than in the other." True; but let it be remembered, — more good

too. A public teacher may often do more ſervice by a pertinent and ſeaſonable reflection, a happy illuſtration, a well judged addreſs, than an ingenious and learned author by a volume. This manner of enlightening the underſtanding, and touching the heart is always at hand, and, where the preacher is a man who hath acquired that authority which propriety of manners, and a real attention to the beſt intereſts of a Chriſtian Society never fail to produce, is attended with a force and influence which the beſt writer is incapable of. A few knowing faithful public teachers of juſt and liberal ſentiments, experimentally acquainted with vital religion, and the genuine fervors of rational devotion, can be of more real ſervice to the cauſe of truth and virtue than a thouſand authors.

BUT, *ſecondly*, it is extremely doubtful whether ſuch a plan would anſwer the end in view. For if you ſhould never explain the Scriptures, nor attempt public inſtruction of any kind, you cannot prevent the human mind from thinking, from ſpeaking, from reaſoning on the Scriptures and Religion. It is too inquiſitive. The ſubject is too intereſting. And if men think, ſpeak, and reaſon, they will differ in opinions, and each will find its peculiar votaries. Perhaps never was an opinion broached where one ſtood ſingle. Sects will, therefore, ariſe. Pride and arrogance, on one ſide, will give the provocation and proclaim the war; zeal perhaps for the truth, or a ſpirit rouſed by oppoſition and aſperity, will engage the other, and thus hoſtilities will commence. This will give the alarm to others, who never thought of calling in queſtion the eſtabliſhed opinions: a ſpirit of

of inquiry will be awakened, and in attempting to diſcover on which ſide the truth lies, new avenues will open: ſo that without ſuppoſing a ſtate that never exiſted, ſo far as I know, it would be impoſſible that the Scriptures ſhould be in every body's hands, and read publicly every week, without thinking about them, and judging what particular ſyſtem of religion they contained. In a country of liberty, men would ſpeak their ſentiments with freedom, they would diſpute, they would write, they would print. Nor would all the terrors of popiſh inquiſition wholly reſtrain this impulſe of the human mind. One would have thought, when the Eccleſiaſtic monarchy of the papal chair had arrived at ſuch abſolute dominion, that the kings of the earth trembled at its nod, that no one would have been bold enough to differ publicly from the eſtabliſhed ſuperſtition;—but there is in ſome minds an enthuſiaſm, a deluſion ariſing from falſe notions of ſuperior communications, and in others, a curioſity and innate love of the truth, with a vigour of ſpirit utterly unconquerable, and that will dare to break through every reſtraint: the moſt deſpotic and unrelenting exerciſe, therefore, of Eccleſiaſtic tyranny produce inſtances of both theſe; and by the ſecret, though ſlow and diſtant operation of the laſt, were the reformers enabled to aſſert their own cauſe, and vindicate the common rights of humanity. Was this, may we aſk, owing to the vanity of public teachers in broaching new fangled opinions?—If it was, it may be pronounced to be one happy effect of it, that ought to recommend this inſtitution to all the friends of civil and religious liberty, and render it venerable to the end of the world.

BUT, if by ſuperſeding public inſtruction, the growth of what is called ſectariſm, and the ſpreading of different opinions ſhould be prevented, what would be the conſequence? An eſtabliſhed ſyſtem would prevail,—not the Scriptures: for they will never become an eſtabliſhed ſyſtem, but on ſuch general terms as leaves every body to think for himſelf, and to be directed by his own opinions and mode of worſhip:—but a ſyſtem fabricated by Eccleſiaſtics, who, taking the advantage of this reſtraint laid upon public inſtruction, would gain an unlimited aſcendance over the mind; and thus the truth would remain more obſcured than amidſt all the variety of opinions that ever have been, or will be broached. If you do not, ſomewhere, open an avenue to the truth, as a balance to the beſt eſtabliſhment in religion, or the moſt perfect human ſyſtem that ever was yet formed, you at once injure the cauſe of chriſtianity and religious liberty, and put into the hands of men, a power which, experience leaves us no room to doubt, that they will certainly abuſe.—And what can more fairly promiſe ſucceſs than public teaching, exempted from the terror of penal laws, and enjoying the immunities of a free conſtitution? What could be a more effectual antidote againſt the poiſon of eſtabliſhed error? What could more effectually curb the inſolence, or check the encroachments of eſtabliſhed Eccleſiaſtics? No one would pretend to ſubſtitute human deciſions in place of the Scriptures, or human authority in the place of evidence. The body of the people, accuſtomed to free and candid diſquiſition, would learn to think, and to vindicate the rights of their reaſonable natures; and it would become equally difficult to render them the dupes of civil or Eccleſiaſtic

ſiaſtic uſurpation. Such a degree of knowledge, and ſuch a ſenſe of freedom, would be equally hateful and offenſive to prieſts and tyrants: but they are the glory and pride of Great Britain, encouraged by our conſtitution, and the ſupport of it;—the honour of the great body of our clergy, and daily encreaſed and confirmed by them.

BUT beſides explaining the Scriptures, and promoting the cauſe of truth and religious liberty, there are other great and important advantages that ariſe from this inſtitution. Every one may be ſufficiently convinced, from his own experience, that religious conſiderations, however in theory they may be acknowledged worthy to occupy our moſt ſerious attention, and of the higheſt moment to our real happineſs, are by no means the objects generally entertained, and on which the mind delights to dwell and employ itſelf. Our convictions concerning the moſt important truths, and the impreſſions they leave upon the mind, are evidently occaſional and momentary; or if they continue for a longer ſpace, they gradually loſe their force and wear off, till amidſt objects that daily ſurround us, and ſolicit our attention from more immediate views, we loſe ſight of them altogether.—Men often come to contrive expedients, and to invent ingenious excuſes to ſatisfy themſelves amidſt the moſt criminal inattention to every thing ſerious, without once attempting to balance the conſiſtency of their preſent conduct and future hopes. It can, therefore, admit of no doubt, that the inattention of the generality to religious concerns, amidſt that diſſipation of mind which evidently prevails, amidſt the

various purſuits of riches, pleaſure, and ambition, that ſeem to engroſs every affection, and to captivate every power of the ſoul, public teaching muſt be, in the higheſt degree, neceſſary. In ſuch a ſituation there is, ſurely, great need of having divine things brought often under our review, and urged home upon the conſcience by every poſſible argument. There is great need of daily monitors, by whoſe friendly and ſeaſonable aid, ſecure and thoughtleſs minds, if poſſible may be alarmed, and brought to fix upon themſelves, and their eternal concerns; and that thoſe who have been ſeduced from the paths of virtue, may be brought back again to their firſt convictions, and the original impreſſions they had felt be recovered, improved, and confirmed;—for this purpoſe a public teacher of any talents hath a great advantage. While he deſcribes characters, while he reproves vice in general, he may draw ſuch ſtriking outlines, features ſo ſtrong and lively, as, however ſeemingly diſtant and concealed, will neceſſarily, on many occaſions, exhibit ones own picture to himſelf, without alarming his pride;—he may pierce the conſcience without awakening reſentments againſt the hand that levelled the weapon. And which is no inconſiderable part of his office, by a proper repreſentation, by a pertinent application of his ſubject, he may adminiſter ſeaſonable medicine to the mind oppreſſed by calamity, or diſquieted by a ſenſe of guilt;—while it is yet tender and ſuſceptible, and every avenue lies open, what heartfelt lectures may he not read, what conſolations may he not pour into the ſoul, what reviving hopes, what animated views may he not lay open? "The words of the wiſe are gracious, and pleaſant words like the honey comb."

comb."—God himſelf condeſcends to comfort thoſe that are caſt down, and hath given it in commiſſion to his miniſters to comfort his people;—"to ſtrengthen the weak hands, and to confirm the feeble knees, and to ſay to them that are of a fearful heart, fear not, be ſtrong."—A miniſter, therefore, if fitted to diſcharge this part of his work with tenderneſs and capacity, does honour to his character, and is a bleſſing to his people.

THERE is another conſideration on this ſubject that ariſes from the unavoidable circumſtances in which the far greater part of mankind are placed—They are engaged in one continued ſtruggle amidſt the embarraſſments and cares of life. They enter early into toil and laborious exerciſe for their daily bread, which naturally contracts the intellectual faculties. Their whole time and attention are occupied in providing for their own bodily wants, or in furniſhing neceſſary ſupport and proviſion for their families. The little inſtruction they had received while children hath left but confuſed and imperfect traces upon their minds, which their daily and neceſſary engagements are apt entirely to deface—In ſuch circumſtances were it not for the advantage of public inſtruction, it may be affirmed, that they would loſe religious impreſſions altogether, and generate into a ſtate of downright barbariſm.—But is not private inſtruction a more ſucceſsful method of promoting religious knowlege? If it ſhould, it is a method expoſed to every objection that can be offered againſt public inſtruction: becauſe, if a miniſter have acceſs to inſtruct his people in private, he may explain the ſcriptures to them, and propagate his own opinions among them; you muſt, therefore,

exclude

exclude private as well as public teaching, or confine both equally to reading the ſcriptures. But the fact is, that private teaching though highly proper, is not equally fitted for general edification with public: no teacher being able to repeat to a number of different little ſocieties what he can do weekly to one. Here all are taught at the ſame expence to the teacher, and the ſame profit to the hearer, if the ſpeaker equally aims at inſtruction. The one, however, is not intended to ſuperſede the other: both operate towards the ſame end, and are no leſs the duty of the miniſters of religion.

BUT in every inquiry of this kind, it will be ſaid, that the only way to arrive at any probable concluſion is, to appeal to experience. What good hath this inſtitution done for near eighteen hundred years paſt? Is not the ignorance to be found among the greater part of thoſe who attend upon public teaching, even of the plaineſt doctrines of Chriſtianity almoſt incredible, where this inſtitution hath obtained, and been continued from generation to generation? Their notions of God are at beſt but a confuſed medley of ſuperſtion and enthuſiaſm, with ſome unintelligible jargon of ſyſtematic divinity; ſo that you would be tempted to think that natural religion had been entirely left out of the queſtion. Where then are the effects of this inſtitution? Of what benefit hath it been for promoting knowledge and virtue? I am well diſpoſed to admit the force of this objection ſo far as to acknowlege, that—where the corruptions and abominable ſuperſtitions introduced by *prieſts*, and which have been propagated with ſuch aſtoniſhing ſucceſs, have been ſubſtituted and taught in the place of genuine Chriſtianity

Chriſtianity—a greater perverſion hath followed than could have ariſen from the total ſuppreſſion of this inſtitution: as it may be affirmed without violating the laws of truth and charity, that no ſpecies of religion, ſo far as we know, profeſſed among the moſt barbarous nations, hath yet equalled the ſyſtem of prieſtcraft that prevailed in Chriſtendom for many centuries—originally bottomed on the tenets which have been the ſubject of this inquiry, and which every *prieſt*, in circumſtances that would permit them to operate in all their latitude, would infallibly re-eſtabliſh. And in the general it ought to be admitted, that if public teachers had been at more pains to underſtand and explain the religion of Chriſt,—had been more diſengaged from the prejudices of eſtabliſhed creeds, from a ſpirit of ambition, from pride and party views,—had been more honeſt, and more attentive to the great duties of their office, their hearers would have been more intelligent, more rational, and better Chriſtians. But may not an inſtitution be excellent, and highly beneficial in itſelf, though neglected, or even abuſed and perverted from its original purpoſe? If the abuſe of an inſtitution were a good argument againſt it, it is difficult to ſay what inſtitutions ought to be preſerved among mankind. Chriſtianity, natural religion, and civil government, would be baniſhed from the world together. No reaſoning, therefore, can be more unjuſt. The very abuſe may ſhow the neceſſity, not of aboliſhing the inſtitution, but of reſtoring it to its original intention and purity. The more that *prieſts* have poiſoned the fountains of knowledge and virtue, of the greater importance to the happineſs of mankind muſt intelligent, humble, and faithful teachers

teachers be. If Chriſtianity hath been perverted by the deſigns of Eccleſiaſtics who have had a diſtinct trade — a political fabric of their own to eſtabliſh; let it be reſtored again to its primitive ſimplicity by men who derive their character from their work, and their importance from the choice of thoſe who are ſatisfied — that they deſerve it.

BUT, ſetting aſide the groſs ſuperſtitions and total perverſion of the human faculties by a falſe ſyſtem of religion — it is to be hoped, that, even amidſt many errors, this inſtitution hath been attended with happy effects on the morals of mankind. Before we can poſſibly affirm the contrary, we muſt ſtate a caſe where Chriſtianity hath been profeſſed without the aids of this inſtitution: if ſuch a caſe could be found, and it could be fairly made appear that the ſame meaſure of religious knowledge, the ſame meaſure of private and public virtue, of civil and moral order hath obtained, it muſt be admitted, that, from ſuch a comparative view, no feeble preſumption would ariſe againſt what hath been urged on this ſubject. But it is preſumed, that no ſuch inſtance can be produced.—And we can ſtate another comparative view, that gives all the ſatisfaction on this article that is neceſſary;—that, where other circumſtances are ſuppoſed to be equal, the ſuperior knowledge, piety, and aſſiduous labours of a miniſter among his people, ſeldom fail to be diſtinguiſhed, if he hath continued any time among them —— In the loweſt view, if public teaching hath not improved the religious knowledge, and manners of mankind, to any conſiderable degree, may it not be modeſtly affirmed that it hath preſerved

them

them from growing worſe? And this, could no more be ſaid, would render this inſtitution a public benefit of no ſmall account. But if ever it ſhall be attended with remarkable ſucceſs, it muſt be entirely left to the divine bleſſing unreſtrained by creeds, or articles, or conditions of any kind — but the Bible, public order and decency.

AND now, reader, having finiſhed this little work, and diſcharged what I thought my duty to the public, I turn myſelf, in concluſion, to another quarter.

"O thou eternal fountain of light, to whom is known the purity of my intentions in what I have, in theſe pages, committed to paper, accept, I beſeech thee, of this humble tribute I would offer up unto thee,—intended to expoſe, what hath always appeared to me, the preſumptuous claims of men to powers which thou haſt committed to no mortal. If theſe arrogant pretenders are under the influence of an erroneous conſcience, and have been betrayed by the weakneſs of their own underſtandings, let the light penetrate their hearts, and break through prejudices more obſtinate than adamant. If a ſpirit of pride, if deſigning and ambitious views have firſt led them aſide, and brought them, in the iſſue, to impoſe upon themſelves, or have rendered them unwilling to acknowledge the truth, and to undeceive the credulous, ſuperſtitious multitude;—ſmite this pride to the earth, let theſe ambitious views appear in their natural odious light, as a baſe uſurpation of thy ſacred prerogative; and diſpoſe them to glorify thee by an ingenuous and open confeſſion. But if the writer himſelf, after his beſt inquiries, ſhould be the

the perſon miſled by prejudices, and who hath, in any inſtance, departed from the truth; if he hath dropt the moſt diſtant hint injurious to the important doctrines of Chriſtianity, the ſpiritual kingdom of thy Son, or the character of his faithful and humble miniſters,—out of thine abundant goodneſs proclaimed in the goſpel of peace, and on which he deſires to reſt all his hopes, do thou forgive thy erring miſtaken ſervant,—but let his labours periſh."

FINIS.

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